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ALFRED HITCHCOCK's

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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HITCHCOCK**

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STORIES**

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EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

As our annual bow to the upcoming season of Halloween, we've assembled an array of stories in this issue that evoke its spirit(s). (Well, we wouldn't want to *pro*-voke them.) Not every story, of course, falls into that category—there's John H. Dirckx's fine puzzler, "The Mahogany Wardrobe," written in the style of Mary Roberts Rinehart—but several do, and their range is considerable. F. M. Maupin, whom we welcome to our pages with this first story, conjures up a haunted chapel in Wales; Elliott Capon introduces us to a houseful of vampires in New York. Nancy C. Swoboda recounts an adventure in a very odd rooming house in which . . . well, to say

anything more is to say too much, except that what's there beats ghosts all hollow. And David Kaufman follows his first story, "In the Lake at Garlock's Bend" (July 1985), with another—even more chilling—set in the same eerie locale.

Finally, the Mystery Classic, Richard Middleton's delightful "The Ghost Ship," is about, um, a ghost ship.

In addition to all this, we have two special items in this issue, an article by Robert Bloch on his days as one of those who put together the famous Hitchcock television series, now being remade by NBC for this fall's TV season, and, second, a new contest, different from any we've done before. You'll find it on page 4; good luck to everyone!

Cathleen Jordan, Editor; **Lois Adams**, Managing Editor; **Cindy Goldman**, Editorial Assistant; **Ralph Rubino**, Art Director; **Gerry Hawkins**, Associate Art Director; **Ron Kuliner**, Art Editor; **Marianne Weldon**, Associate Designer; **Sheila Smith**, Art Assistant; **Carl Barte**, Director of Manufacturing; **Carole Dixon**, Production Manager; **Lauren C. Council**, Production Assistant; **Cynthia Manson**, Director, Subsidiary Rights; **Mary Ann Goldstone**, Manager, Contracts & Permissions; **Louise Mugar**, Circulation Director, Retail Marketing; **Jay Bresnehan**, Circulation Planning Director; **Priscilla Garston**, Circulation Director, Subscriptions; **Irene Bozoki**, Classified Advertising Director; **Jamie Fillon**, Advertising Manager; **William F. Battista**, Advertising Director

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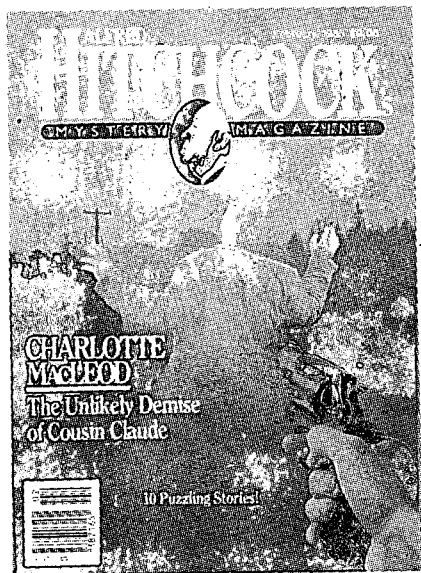
NOTE OF CORRECTION: The copyright line run with Nancy E. Berk's poem "The Lady or the Tiger?" on page 4 of the October 1985 issue was incomplete. It should have read "From Wistless Wanderings, copyright © 1980 by Nancy E. Berk."

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SPECIAL HITCHCOCK CONTEST

Mystery readers should be especially good at solving puzzles—herewith, therefore, we bring you a new challenge. And, of course, a chance to win a prize, to wit: **First Prize: \$300; Second Prize: \$200; Third Prize: \$100.**

But it's not easy, so go carefully through each part! *NOTE: Your answers to Part 1 must all be correct before your answer to Part 2A will be judged, and the answer to Part 2A must be correct before your answers to Part 2B and Part 3 will be considered.* All answers must be given on the entry blank on page 5. For additional rules, see bottom of page 5.

Part 1

- A. The uranium in the wine bottle in *Notorious*, the musical code in *The Lady Vanishes*, the secret message in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*—Hitchcock had a word for these plot devices. What was it?
- B. The person responsible for creating the famous profile of Hitchcock seen on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (and on page 149 of this magazine) was not primarily known as an artist. Name this person.
- C. The musical theme for *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* was taken from "The Funeral March of a Marionette." Who wrote this piece?
- D. The head of a famous current nighttime TV clan starred in an *Alfred Hitchcock Hour* episode directed by The Master himself. Name the star.
- E. Hitchcock became easily identifiable through his walk-on appearances in his films. In *Lifeboat*, however, he was faced with a dilemma regarding this appearance. What was the dilemma, and how did Hitchcock solve it?

Part 2

- A. In what Hitchcock movie does Cary Grant try to get arrested at an auction?
- B. If you had to think up a different title (preferably a witty one) for this same film, what would you like to call it? (For example, *Rear Window* might be renamed *Back Pane* or *Room with a Stew*.)

Part 3

Write a concluding line for the following limerick. (Note that the last word must rhyme with "smile.")

"Good evening," he'd say with a smile
As he filled in that rotund profile,
"Tonight's special show
Will amuse you, I know,

SPECIAL HITCHCOCK CONTEST ENTRY BLANK (Please print.)

My answers to the contest questions are as follows:

Part 1

A. _____ C. _____

B. _____ D. _____

E. _____

Part 2

A. _____ B. _____

Part 3 _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE: _____

Mail this form to the following address:

Special Hitchcock Contest
Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine
380 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

Entries must be received by **November 1st, 1985.**

CONTEST RULES

Davis Publications, Inc., and Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine are offering all participants in the contest on pages 4 and 5 of this magazine the opportunity to win up to \$300, by demonstrating their knowledge of Alfred Hitchcock's life and work and their skill in capturing the Hitchcockian spirit.

To win, a participant must correctly answer all the questions in Parts 1 and 2A of the contest, suggest a creative and insightful alternative title for the movie (Part 2B), and provide, in the opinion of the judges, the cleverest and most satisfactory concluding line for the poem in Part 3, while maintaining its meter and rhyme scheme. The entrant who best fulfills these requirements will be named First Place Winner and will receive a check for \$300 from Davis Publications, Inc. Second and third place winners (one of each) will also be named and will be awarded checks for \$200 and \$100 respectively.

Each entrant may submit as many entries as he or she likes, as long as each entry is separately submitted on a Special Hitchcock Contest Entry Blank, found on page 5 of this magazine (above). Facsimiles will not be accepted; photocopies of the entry blank will not be accepted. Illegible entries will be disqualified. All entries are non-returnable and are the property of Davis Publications, Inc. Winners will be notified by mail, and winning entries will be published in an upcoming issue of Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine. The employees of Davis Publications, Inc., its subsidiaries, agencies and vendors, and their families are barred from this contest. Tax liability is the responsibility of the prize winners. Offer void where prohibited.

All entries must be received by November 1, 1985.

FICTION

Upon Reflection

by Elliott Capon



Illustration by Daniel Horne

Like most vampires, Darren Meier was very unhappy.

Scratch that; like *all* vampires, Darren Meier was very unhappy. The leering, sadistic count of the movies, the master conniver who reveled in the taking of blood, was one of the most heinous of myths perpetrated by Hollywood on an unsuspecting public. Being a vampire was a miserable way to live . . . er, to unlive. The lust for blood is not the healthy desire of, say, a young man for the company of a young woman, or the need of two tired feet to soak themselves in a hot tub. It is a repulsive need, akin to nothing more than the worst depths of alcoholism or heroin addiction, when the compulsion exceeds the actual act of satiation.

Blood simply does not taste very good, and like others of his ilk, Darren was always nauseated by the little *crack* sound when his teeth pierced the skin, by the way the jugular pulsed against his gums, by his act of violating the privacy of a sleeping or entranced person. There was more to his unhappiness, of course: the whole business of being undead. By all rights, a man drained of his blood, as Darren had been himself those seven years ago when he had been attacked, should have been peaceably buried, his body now

a pile of calcium dust, his soul . . . his soul *somewhere*. Instead, he was forced to hide from the light of the sun day after day, year after year, to be dragged out of his hiding place by his hated compulsion.

If it weren't for the rap sessions, Darren felt he'd have gone mad years ago.

Oh yes, the rap sessions. Darren Meier was by no means the only vampire in the world, far from it. As a matter of fact, he lived in a rather large old house in a northern suburb of New York City with three—count 'em—three other vampires: Ed and Phil and Annie. Neither Ed nor Phil nor Annie nor Darren wore black cloaks or tuxedos or stiff white shirts; they all wore jeans and knit tops and shorts on warm summer evenings. And they all hated being vampires. But there was nothing they could do about it.

Darren was the last one "home" on this particular night, getting in about forty minutes before dawn. They always sat up as long as possible, to work things out as much as they could before retiring for the day. They didn't *sleep* in their darkened bedrooms, you know, and, very usually, comforting words by a peer helped them get through the hours of solitude.

"What kept you?" Ed asked when Darren finally got in.

"You're not going to believe

this," Darren said, "but I was chased by the police."

"What?" Phil and Annie both said, while Ed asked, "How come?"

"I took it from a guy who had a flat tire on Route 15," Darren said. They always referred to their noxious practice as "taking it." Darren shook his head. He had joined the ranks of the undead back in 1977, and still wore his hair longer than your average CPA. "Except that he must've already called for help and had got back to the car when I found him. Just as I finished, a cop car shows up, and bang, I'm off into the woods, and they're off after me. Took me an hour and a half to circle around here."

"I don't know why you haunt the back roads," Annie sniffed. "I always head into the city. You can hide better in a city, and you can be more discreet about whom you have to lift." They always called their act of accosting a potential victim "lifting."

"Yeah," Phil said, "Darren'd look great perched under a lamppost with a 'come hither' look." The guys laughed, but Annie didn't think it was too funny. Having to lift by pretending to be a prostitute was an indignity that added insult to injury.

The conversation continued for a while longer, wandering

here and there, until Ed said, almost to himself, "I think I turned someone tonight." When they drained a victim completely, with the result of making that someone become a vampire himself, they referred to it as "turning" him.

"Oh no," Annie said. "You promised you'd be careful."

"I didn't take that much," Ed said sharply, biting out each word. "Someone must've gotten to her before me. Short, heavy-set black girl, about twenty, curly hair, in the hospital for a tonsillectomy?" The other three shook their heads. "You think there's someone else working the neighborhood?" Darren asked.

After a few more moments of desultory conversation, Phil glanced at his watch and said, "Hey, it's almost bedtime." They always referred to dawn as "bedtime." "Let's go nappy-bye."

The house they lived in was somewhat post-Revolutionary War, somewhat pre-Civil War. It had fourteen rooms and was built as a house should be built. The living room, where they held their nightly talks, was a lofty cavern with a fireplace at one end and a huge mirror at the other. The fireplace was never used because, having no human needs as such, they were never cold. Timed lights went on and off, and, as Phil had been a wealthy man when he

had been turned himself, the place was legally owned. As far as anyone knew, it was occupied by quiet, keep-to-themselves people.

The mirror—well, that was another story. Vampires, as everyone knows, and in this instance Hollywood was telling the truth, cast no reflection. There were no lights at the end of the room where the hundred-year-old-plus, ornately framed mirror hung, so it was easy for them to avoid looking at it when they used the living room. It might have been an old spider web, repulsive but not doing any harm, so they weren't compelled to remove it, or even desirous of doing so. In truth, they ignored the thing.

Except for Darren. Every night—that is, morning—before retreating to his bed (coffins were so passé), he would make sure that he stood in front of the mirror. That Darren was human was debatable, but that he once had been was undeniable, and in the human breast, hope springs eternal. Every day Darren stood in front of the mirror, knowing he would see no reflection, but hoping, begging (praying?), that one day he would see a reflection, he would see himself again after seven years, and that would mean that the curse of vampirism was removed from him.

This night, as usual, he stood

up, walked sixteen paces to the other end of the room, and stood in front of the mirror. There was the fireplace, cold and dark. The chair that Annie was just getting out of—but not Annie. There was the painting they called "Uncle Jim," which had come with the house. There was every speck of dust on the mantelpiece, there was . . . there was everything else in the room but him.

With a sigh, Darren turned away from the mirror.

There was a loud knocking at the front door.

They froze.

The knocking became a pounding.

Darren's first thought was that the police had somehow traced him home.

"Please!" someone yelled from the outside. "Before the sun comes up! Let me in!"

Before the sun comes up?
What cop is afraid of the sun?

Since Phil's money had bought the place, he was titular leader of the group. "Open the door," he told Ed.

Hesitantly, Ed crossed the room and the foyer, unlocked and pulled open the heavy front door.

A man entered — fell — inside. He looked more like a movie vampire than did the others. Tall, thin, very pale, a few drops of dried blood on his shirt. He was gasping, the open

mouth revealing the pointed canines.

"Who the hell are you?" asked Ed.

"Name's Leo," the stranger gasped. "No time to talk. Sun's coming up. Can you hide me?"

With eight bedrooms, it was the easiest thing in the world to give this Leo a bed. Darren, Annie, Phil, and Ed went to their own rooms and puzzled over the events of the strange evening in their own private darkness. When they got up for their night's wanderings, Leo had already gone. But early the next morning, when they were gathered for their usual tête-à-tête à tête-à-tête, there was a rather polite knock at the front door. Ed opened it again, cautiously, and there stood Leo, a little more kempt, a lot calmer. "May I come in?" he asked.

They pulled another old overstuffed chair in front of the dead fireplace and invited Leo to sit down.

All four were pale, but Darren and his friends had been turned in the late 1970's when they were all less than thirty years of age. Leo had obviously been well into his fifties when his vampiric career had started, and his life to that point had obviously been no bed of roses. The others looked like pictures of health compared to him.

"Forty years I've been at this," he told them. "Wait a minute,

what year is this...? It is? Forty-one, then. Forty-one years I've been living this life, if you can call it that. Forty-one years I'm hiding in a shack near the track over by Mann's Ferry... and last night some hooligans decide to burn it down, just for fun."

"Hooligans?" Annie asked. "You mean punks."

Leo managed a sort of smile. "Thank you, young lady. Slang does change so, you know."

"Why... what made you... how'd you..." Darren stumbled over his words.

"I've known about you kids for two years at least," Leo said. "But there was never any need to, uh, socialize. Misery does not necessarily love company."

"We find the sense of community helpful," said Phil. "We're horribly cursed, and it helps to maintain sanity to talk about it."

Ed had a thoughtful look. "Say, Leo, had you taken a short, heavyset black girl in Lakeview Hospital, with—"

"The tonsillectomy?" Leo finished. "Yes. Yes, that was me. Why?"

"How come we've never run across your work before?" Darren asked.

"Whom do you kids—what did Ed say, take?—usually?"

Darren looked for stranded motorists, kids in lovers' lanes, solitary hitchhikers; Annie

worked the prostitute gambit in New York; Phil cruised the gay bar scene in both New York and nearby White Plains; Ed liked to try his luck at hospitals, all-night fast food places, and the like. Only rarely did they turn anyone, and the non-turned victims, being placed in a miasmic trance at the time of the initial bite, never remembered having been lifted. A comfortable M.O. was the key to success. Leo nodded.

"My usual, uh, prey, is older ladies. A little charm, a little smooch, and then . . . voilà." He shuddered. "That's why we've never crossed paths before. But I've known you were here, like I said, for about two years. When you've been at it as long as I have, well, you know."

Ed was still upset about the black girl. "What were you doing in the hospital in the first place?"

Leo's smile became an embarrassed grin. "Things haven't been so good lately, so I was . . . I was going to rob the blood bank. I've done it before, in emergencies. Not as good as, as . . . you know, but it does satisfy the craving. I saw the girl in the hall, all alone, and so . . ." He raised his hands.

It was Annie who brought up the question all of them had been looking for a polite way to ask. "Do you need a place to stay?"

Leo looked at her with all the

charm a vampire could muster. "Yes, dear, I do. Do you mind?"

"How could we mind?" Phil asked. "You're welcome to stay."

It was nearing dawn, so they got up to go to bed. Again, Darren walked in front of the mirror, again he stared into it. There was the dead fireplace, the five seemingly empty chairs in front of it, the dust on the mantelpiece, but no Darren. With his usual sigh, he went to bed.

They gave Leo a set of keys and showed him where the fresh linen was kept, and that was all that was needed. A week went by, a week that, given the unusual circumstances under which they lived, went normally, unremarkably. Leo didn't usually get home until almost dawn, and couldn't sit in on their post-satiation conversations; even so, they kept his chair in the circle, an almost welcome reminder that they were even less alone than before, that there was another sufferer of their peculiar curse.

On the eighth night after Leo's arrival, one Virginia Farmer went out on a date with her fairly steady boyfriend, one Brian Crane. A discussion that needn't concern us turned into an argument, which escalated into a fight, the denouement of which had Virginia leaving Brian's car in high dudgeon on a rather dark piece of County

Road 119. She was so angry she didn't hear the footsteps behind her, and of course, when Darren took her, she didn't remember anything of the attack.

Such rare good luck had Darren home by midnight, a good three or four hours before any of the others were expected. Having to spend all the daylight hours in an immobile but conscious state, Darren was in no mood to merely sit quietly and ruminate until his companions got back; he had to do something. There were no books and no TV in the house.

It suddenly occurred to him that it had been years since he had explored this great big old house of theirs.

There is really no word in the English language to indicate extremely mild surprise, but had there been, that would have described Darren's mood when he opened the door that led to the basement stairs. He knew it had been years since anyone had gone down there, but the hinges didn't squeak at all. Surely, after five or six years of neglect, there would have been some noise...? The light switch, which had been installed sometime in the 1940's but hadn't been used since the late seventies, flicked on with no problem, revealing what Darren had figured it would: the basement. He had no strong memories of the place, but

everything seemed to look as it should have. A few old steamer trunks, covered with dust and cobwebs; an old couch, left over from previous owners, tattered and filthy; a few rotting two-by-fours in a corner; a stack of eight or ten cardboard boxes, piled neatly; some yellowing *Life* magazines on a stained and pitted ex-coffee table...

Those cardboard cartons. That stack against the far wall. They weren't covered with dust. They weren't wrinkled and seamed and cracked in the corners.

They were new.

Darren pulled the top one open. It was full of clear plastic packages of what seemed to be white powder. He tore open another box. The same. He lifted one of the packages out, hefting it, squeezing it, kneading it. It was either heroin or cocaine, of that he was sure, it didn't matter which. But... who? How? He whispered something he hadn't even thought in seven years.

"My God."

He put the drugs back and closed the boxes. He slowly went back upstairs to the living room, the center, essentially, of whatever normal universe he still managed to cling to.

Somebody was using their house as a drug warehouse. Assuming each package was a kilo, and that there were twelve bags in each box; times eight

boxes, ninety-six kilos, two hundred eleven point two pounds, a pound of that stuff worth, what, fifty, a hundred thousand dollars? There was a fantastic fortune down there.

But who was *somebody*? The windows were locked, the doors were kept locked, no one from the outside could get in. It had to be one of them. But *how*? And *why*? What use had a vampire for money? When did whoever it was find the time to do this?

The three-letter torturers HOW WHO WHY chased after each other in his head, over and over and around and around, till he felt he was going crazy. With a violence he hadn't used in seven years he viciously kicked at the nearest chair, knocking it out of the circle and onto its back.

That calmed him. He bent over to pick it up, and as he straightened, he happened to look into the mirror at the other end of the room. The chair dropped out of his hands and crashed back onto the floor.

Now it was clear.

Phil remarked that this was the only time Darren had been the first one back. Their conversation ran the usual gamut through the pre-dawn hours until Leo made his usual, almost-dawn appearance. Darren invited him to sit down and chat for a min-

ute, which, with a glance at his watch, Leo did.

The five were sitting in their circle of chairs, making small-talk, when Darren said, "It's always fascinated me how we don't cast reflections in mirrors."

Ed shrugged. "That part is no more fascinating than any other."

"No," said Darren, "I mean, it's unique." He got up out of his chair and slowly crossed the room. "I mean, look at this big old mirror. Everything that has light refracting off it in the room—the walls, the furniture, the fireplace—everything but us is reflected in here." He was standing right in front of it, facing it, and they could see the room reflected around him. They saw the chairs they were sitting in, of course, but not themselves.

"Is there a point, Darren?" Leo asked. "It's getting late."

"Oh yes," said Darren. "There's a point." He shot out a hand, grabbed the ornate frame at the base, and shoved the mirror sideways. Although it now hung wildly askew, the reflected picture did not change.

"You'd think," Darren said, "that when a mirror is moved, it would reflect what's in front of it, not what it's used to reflecting."

Nobody moved, rigid with confusion. Darren heaved the

mirror off the wall and threw it to the floor, where it landed not with the crash of breaking glass but with the whuff of canvas striking wood.

"It's a painting," he said. "How'd you do it, Leo?"

Within a second, Leo was up, his back to the fireplace, a large crucifix in his hand. "Very good, Darren," he said. "Very commendable."

"What is going on?" Annie asked, her voice perilously close to a whine.

"Leo is not a vampire," Darren said, to three *What!*'s.

"I was down the basement before," Darren continued, "and I found a large quantity of drugs, newly placed there."

"Heroin," Leo said. "About three million dollars' worth."

"I knew it had to be one of us," Darren said, "because no one else could get in here. Then I knocked over a chair and noticed that the reflection in the mirror didn't *reflect* the new position of that chair. Somebody had substituted a perfect painting of the room—as it would look after we added a fifth chair for Leo. Now, who would want to substitute a painting for a mirror? Obviously, someone who would reflect a mirror image. Someone who is not a vampire. Right, Leo?"

Leo nodded. "Absolutely correct, Darren, absolutely cor-

rect. As I told you, I knew you were here. A big old house that no one comes near, inhabitants who sleep all day, who couldn't go to the police in the most dire of circumstances . . . what better place for a warehouse for my merchandising operation?"

"But how did you . . . the painting . . ." Phil stammered.

"Remember the first night I showed up?" Leo asked him. "Right at the crack of dawn? In the confusion, you never noticed that I cast a reflection. I had done my homework, I knew what this room looked like, less a few details, so I spent the rest of that day finishing my masterpiece." He pointed with his free hand to the painting on the floor. "I'm pretty good, I think, but drug-smuggling pays so much better than selling original oils."

"And at night?" asked Annie.

"At night, I'd go home and sleep, making sure I got here just before dawn. During the day, while you all . . . rested . . . I'd go about my business. Since we'd only see each other for five or ten minutes a day, all I'd have to do would be to keep this room looking the same. Oh, and a midnight attack with a hypodermic on a likely victim with a tonsillectomy — remember, Ed? — just iced the cake. Ingenious of me, no?"

"What now?" Darren asked quietly.

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Leo looked at his watch. "It's about four minutes to dawn. I'll just hold this little cross in front of me till you're forced to retire, and then, well, I guess today's the day I transact a small sale of some goods I've been storing in your basement. After that, it's adios."

"No," Darren said, slowly crossing the room.

Leo pushed back against the mantelpiece, holding the crucifix out in front of him as far as he could stretch his arm.

"This'll hold you off!" he cried.

Phil and Ed and Annie had gotten up and were moving slowly towards him.

"No," Darren said, again. "You've seen too many movies. The cross does not deter us."

Leo had time for one last yell.

That night, at their rap session, it was Ed who voiced what they all wanted to say: that while satiating the compulsion on an unconscious person satisfied their strange craving, attacking a helpless victim while he screamed with fear was fun. Lots and lots of fun.

FICTION

If Cooks Could Kill

by Robert Gray



Illustration by Janet Aulizio

16

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“O kay,” said Henri Cavanaugh, pacing across the carpet, “Read me your list of all likely suspects.”

Laura, sitting at the large oak desk in their study, picked up her notepad and examined it for a moment. Of the two dozen names originally listed there, all but four had been crossed out during this discussion.

“Well, here’s what we’ve narrowed it down to. Alice, the woman from Rochester who’s done this kind of thing off and on for nearly twenty years; Mary, a local girl, the one who was her mother’s nurse until the poor lady died recently; Stella, the Italian woman, new to Saratoga, but with a reputation in New York we can’t easily overlook; and Monique, inexperienced, lacking apparently all motivation . . .”

“Ah yes, Monique.”

“A finalist only because you insist and, need I add, extremely attractive, if you like your women petite, with sweetly accented, servile voices.”

“Of course, how else?” Henri asked, grinning. “Why do you think I married you?”

“Uh-huh. So these are our prime suspects, Mr. Cavanaugh. Now all we have to do is choose one.”

Henri sighed and walked over

to one of the four stained glass windows in the booklined room, which was grudgingly letting in the faintest hint of soft blue light. The afternoon outside had turned cloudy. A storm was imminent.

He studied the nineteenth century hunt scene depicted on the window, particularly the horses, whose spreadeagled gait had been created when artists had no idea how a horse ran. The haughty gentlemen atop them looked as if they were riding hobbyhorses in somebody’s lush playroom.

“I’m still not convinced we’ve got a motive here, Laura. You already have someone in three days a week to clean the place. And since I do the cooking when we don’t go out . . .”

“Ah, Watson. I believe you’ve stumbled upon a key clue there.”

“Okay, okay. So my cooking presently leaves something to be desired.”

“Like taste.”

“But did I criticize your sleuthing abilities when we first began working as a team?”

“Henri, dear. There is absolutely no detective equivalent for last night’s dinner.”

“You mean my roast capon?”

“I mean your charred pigeon.”

Henri surrendered with a shrug. “Okay, you win. We get a live-in cook/housekeeper.”

"Poor baby. I promise I'll arrange kitchen visitation rights for you during negotiations. Now, assuming that we can eliminate your friend Monique on the grounds that she's just another pretty face, I nominate Stella."

"God, wasn't she the fascist? Came on a little strong for my taste."

"Nonsense. She's just a take-charge kind of gal. Precisely what this operation needs. Somebody to whip us into domestic shape, as it were. Agreed?"

"Does it matter?"

Laura smiled. "You know how much I value your opinion on crucial domestic matters."

Before Henri could think of an appropriate comeback, the telephone rang and Laura answered it.

"Oh, hello, Mother. How are you?"

Henri breathed a sigh of relief. He and Laura's mother were not on the best of terms, never had been. She considered him a hopelessly lowbrow gold-digger, unworthy of her daughter. On the rare occasions when she called their home, if Laura didn't answer, the witch hung up without speaking. Henri would dutifully relay the message to his wife and she'd call her mother back.

Laura, who loved them both,

had miraculously remained neutral.

Henri watched his wife stretch out her lanky frame in the swivel chair and run a hand through her long red hair as she listened. Occasionally she tossed in a "Yes, Mother" or "Of course you are," just to prove she was listening. Henri loved the sound of her seductively raspy voice.

As the phone conversation continued, Henri noticed a change in Laura's tone, from politely noncommittal to concerned, emphasized further by her particularly intriguing question, "Then you're saying he's dead?"

Henri moved away from the window and sat down in one of the two leather armchairs in front of the desk. He read shock and worry in his wife's face.

"Mother! Mother, control yourself. I know it's terrible, but we must be calm about this. . . . Of course I'll try to help you, if I can. No, I know you don't approve of my doing this sort of thing. Yes, this is a special case. . . . No, he won't, not if you don't want him to. . . . Mother, that isn't fair. You know it isn't. He's no such thing."

Henri had a pretty good idea who was being discussed here.

"All right, Mother. Now start from the beginning. . . . The *beginning*, Mother."

This seemed like an opportune time for drinks. Henri went over to the antique rolltop desk in a secluded corner of the study and poured two scotch and sodas from the small bar they kept there. When he returned to his chair, he placed one of the drinks within Laura's reach on the desk. She glanced up from her notepad and smiled faintly.

Five minutes later, Laura hung up the phone. She swallowed what remained of her drink, sat back in her chair, and stared at Henri.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Would you believe we have a client?"

Not the Wicked Witch of the West, thought Henri. "Not your mother," he said.

Laura nodded. "A man who was staying with her this week is apparently now dying."

Henri suppressed a wise-crack. "Tell me about it."

Laura picked up her notepad. "Well, to begin with, each autumn at this time Mother organizes her Champignons Harvest Festival."

"Translation?"

"She and a select group of friends belong to a gourmet club of sorts. At various times during the year one of them is responsible for an appropriate banquet, depending upon the particular fruits of that season.

Mother has always focused on various dishes prepared with freshly picked wild mushrooms. At all of these banquets, the ladies of the club choose three local chefs to prepare their feasts."

"Back up just a sec. By wild mushrooms, I take it you mean the kind that, if you don't know what you're doing . . ."

"Are poisonous, deadly. But the club has been holding this dinner for decades without incident. Mother and her friends are experts at identifying edible fungi."

Again Henri nobly resisted a punchline.

"I gather somebody blew it this year?"

"So it would seem. One of Mother's guests began showing symptoms last night, about twenty-four hours after the dinner. He isn't dead yet, but there doesn't seem to be much hope. The police have been at Mother's house all day. And, you'll no doubt be pleased to hear, one detective in particular has been a constant irritant to her."

"Mac?"

Laura nodded. Detective Sergeant David McKerney had worked, involuntarily for the most part, with the Cavanaughs on several previous cases. He was usually the beneficiary of their hard work, since they shunned notoriety for many reasons, not the least of which

was the fact that they were unlicensed.

"She said Mac refuses to cooperate with her in keeping this scandal out of the newspapers. Her friends in the club are all mortified, naturally, and are blaming one another for selecting the bad mushrooms."

"What about the chefs?"

"I don't know. I'm sure the police will be in touch with them."

"Does she have a copy of the menu?"

Laura shook her head. "She threw it away the day after the banquet. She's not one for keeping things, you know. She's rather obsessed with neatness and order. She said she remembers many of the dishes that were served, but I don't think it would hurt to go directly to the chefs for the details."

"I just thought of something. If some of those mushrooms were poisonous, and everyone ate together, how is it that only one person suffered the consequences?"

"That, dear Henri, is why people employ detectives."

Laura had Henri drop her off at her mother's house. She even managed to coerce him into trespassing all the way up the oak-lined drive to the stone portico of the front entrance.

There were nine cars in the parking area near the carriage barn, which was located on the left side of the house. Laura recognized only Mac's brown Chevrolet sedan, looking odd and ungainly in the distinguished company of all those Mercedes and Cadillacs.

Saunders, who had been the Woodward's butler for all of Laura's forty years and most of his eighty, escorted her to the parlor, where a somber crowd had gathered. Sixteen of them were proper Saratoga society matrons, all suitably attired as such. They were seated primly on the stiff Victorian furniture scattered throughout the cavernous room, and sipped almost in unison from delicate china teacups as Laura made her entrance.

Mac was standing near the marble fireplace, his elbow resting on the mantel and his undivided attention focused on her mother, who was obviously giving him a stern dressing-down on the proper respect he should be showing to his superiors.

"Ah, here she is now," said Laura's mother.

Mac did a nice job of disguising his surprise upon seeing who this nasty woman's daughter was. He guessed from Laura's formal attitude that their past dealings were not

family knowledge, and made no sign of recognition.

Laura walked over to the fireplace. A gauntlet of elderly ladies greeted her as she walked past them, their polite smiles doing little to mask the strain evident on their powdered faces.

"Sergeant McKerney, this is my daughter, the one I've been telling you . . ."

"Mother, please. What have you been saying?"

Mac smiled grimly. "Your mother says you've had some kind of experience with this stuff. She insists that I direct all my inquiries through you so that she and her friends here can be spared the embarrassment of a public spectacle. I keep telling her it just ain't that easy. There are laws, ma'am."

"I'm afraid this gentleman is right, Mother. I know this is all terrible and upsetting for you, but the poor man has a job to do and he does need your assistance. Now . . ."

Laura could see that her mother was on the verge of tears again, and not hearing any of this. She asked Mac if he could temporarily direct his questions to some of the other ladies. He agreed. She led her mother out of the parlor and upstairs to her bedroom. The canopied bed was flawlessly made and covered with a pale blue spread that matched per-

fectly everything in the room, from the drapes to the rug to the furniture, even down to the jars on her dressing table.

Sometimes it was hard for Laura to believe that anyone had ever lived in this house. It always had the undisturbed atmosphere of a museum, as if the rooms should be roped off from the public. Yet she had spent nearly thirty years here. Living with Henri had quickly altered most of her previous assumptions about neatness and order.

They sat together on the edge of the bed and Laura handed her mother some tissues to dry her eyes. "I want, when you feel strong enough, for you to tell me everything you can about this poor man and how the tragedy came about."

"Oh Laura, it's all so horrid. I still want to believe it was only a dream. His name . . . his name is Philip Booker. Have you heard of him?"

"No."

"Well, he has, or had, a cooking show on public television. He's quite famous in culinary circles."

"Henri might know him, but then he doesn't watch much on television besides movies and sports programs."

"Hmmp. As I was saying, Philip is an extremely charming and amusing young man. He came from this area origi-

nally, of common stock you understand, but he studied in European culinary schools after leaving here. The television show came about from his reputation as a chef at a fine restaurant in New York, along with his cookbook and, of course, his singular wit and intelligence."

"How did you snare him for your dinner?" asked Laura.

"Quite devious of me, actually, though now I wish I'd never thought of it. Knowing his roots in this region, and not coincidentally being a stockholder in the company that underwrites his show, I simply made a few calls, and naturally he accepted my invitation."

"Naturally."

"On Sunday afternoon our club had its annual mushroom outing. Philip accompanied us. He is quite famous for his mushroom dishes, which is another reason I thought it would be fun to have him here for my dinner. In fact, he introduced us to one particular variety that even we didn't know was edible. And he regaled us with many stories of his adventures in Europe and New York. Since the members of the club are all well-traveled themselves, they could appreciate his anecdotes more than most people he knows. He said as much himself. All in all, it was a splendid

afternoon. We discovered a bounty of mushrooms and returned to the house positively giddy with anticipation."

"What time?"

"Oh, relatively early. Before tea anyway. The chefs were already here and we delivered our harvest to the kitchen immediately so they could begin their preparations."

"Did the cooks check your mushrooms to be certain none were poisonous?"

"Well, only one of them was really at all versed in the field. Chef William Finley. He owns a restaurant out on the lake called William's. I did see him inspecting the mushrooms individually. In fact... oh my God! You know, I remember Philip made a joke as we were leaving the kitchen, cautioning Chef William not to make any mistakes. Chef William just grumbled. He's not the most pleasant of men sometimes, though, of course an adequate cook."

"After we changed for dinner, we met again in the parlor for cocktails. This was about five o'clock. There were seventeen of us, the ladies in the club, plus Philip. Once again he occupied center stage and entertained us with his stories. He was particularly amusing in his recounting of the early days in his career, working for some of the

seedier Saratoga establishments, though of course he wouldn't tell us which ones no matter how we teased. His wit is very sharp and bold, and he has an impressive talent for making everyone in a group feel as if he were speaking to her alone, which is precisely why he comes across so well on the television."

"Were appetizers served?"

Her mother looked at Laura as if she had just questioned the existence of God. "Of course they were, Laura. Let me see. Chef William served Deviled Mushrooms and Stuffed Mushrooms with Cheese and Walnuts; Chef Anton tiny Mushroom and Port Wine Creampuffs; and Chef Jon, um, oh yes, Marinated Raw Mushrooms. All delicious, though I felt the marinated ones were a touch on the vinegary side for my taste. I think he . . ."

"Mother," said Laura, though she was glad to see her mother's mind distracted for the moment.

"Sorry, dear. Did you want to know what they served for dinner? As I said, I disposed of the menu, but perhaps I could recall . . ."

"No, I can get that later, in detail, from the chefs themselves. Tell me a bit more about the incident."

"The incident? It's odd, really,

but there was no incident to speak of. As I told you over the phone, Philip was perfectly healthy. We dined at seven. The conversation remained spirited and intelligent. Afterward, we had coffee and brandy in the parlor and watched the sunset. A local string quartet played Handel and Mozart pieces. We broke up into smaller groups. A few of us played some bridge. Nothing extraordinary."

"However . . ."

"Late yesterday afternoon Philip began complaining of stomach pains and we canceled a dinner date. Because we've never had such a thing occur before, I foolishly made no immediate connection between his discomfort and the mushrooms. However, as the evening progressed, the attacks grew worse and were accompanied by various . . . intestinal difficulties. I called an ambulance. Today I learned . . ."

She could not hold back the tears. Laura embraced her as she collapsed, and decided there had been enough questioning for one day.

After leaving his wife at her mother's place, Henri drove to Albany through a dense, pounding rainstorm. He arrived at two thirty and headed directly

for a suburban restaurant called Chateau D'Orville.

Anton Lapierre may have been French by ancestry, but he was more than a few generations removed from the old country, as far as Henri could tell. His accent showed more Brooklyn than Bordeaux. He seemed about ten years younger than Henri, in his early forties maybe, but half as tall and three times as wide, an apparent tribute to his own cooking.

When Henri arrived, the kitchen was quiet except for Anton, who was chewing out a young prep cook for throwing away some chicken bones instead of adding them to a huge stock pot that was bubbling on the nearby stove. While the chef screamed, the intimidated kid pawed through a trash can, retrieving the carcasses and leg bones of a half dozen chickens. Fortunately, it looked as if a new bag had been recently put in the can. The prep cook juggled the pile of chicken bones against his soiled white apron as he hurried over to the stove and dumped them into the steaming cauldron.

When Anton caught sight of Henri approaching, he spun around as if he were going to continue his act on a new victim. But his face softened and a smile played across his lips. The youngster took advantage

of the distraction and made his retreat.

"Kids!" said Anton by way of explanation.

Henri nodded sympathetically and introduced himself, mumbling something indistinct about his connection with the police investigation of the poisoning. He hoped Anton would know what was going on. Laura had neglected to get the name of the victim during her phone conversation earlier with her distraught mother.

Henri said he would like to get a copy of the menu Anton had served at Mrs. Woodward's house. He knew better than to ask for ingredients. None of these guys would part with a recipe except under court order, but the menu would at least give him a place to start.

The chef escorted Henri into his small, cluttered office just off the kitchen. "It's a damn shame. I heard about it a couple of minutes ago on the radio. Mrs. Woodward's a nice lady in her way. Hate to see her have to go through this kind of thing, y'know? Leave it to Phil Booker to make trouble."

"I don't think he's too thrilled about what's happened, either. Do you?"

"Him? Yeah, well . . . I got extra copies of that menu here someplace. Figured there'd be people after 'em soon's I heard.

Guess the newspaper types'll have a field day with us tomorrow, huh?"

Anton began pawing through the mess on his desk.

"Tell me if it's none of my business," said Henri, "but why do I get the feeling you're worried more about Mrs. Woodward and your own rep than you are about the poor guy who's dying?"

Anton shrugged, then shook his head. "I'll tell you something, buddy. You hold your breath lookin' for somebody who's broke up over Booker's accident, and you're gonna run out of breaths. He was a jerk when I met him twenty years ago and he's an even bigger jerk now."

"Did you work with him back then?"

"In a manner of speakin'. I came up to this area from New York when I was eighteen. Used to work as a stablehand at Aqueduct and Belmont race tracks, so like everybody I followed that circus up to Saratoga in August. One year I got in this fight with the trainer I was workin' for and I quit. When they all go back to the city, I stay around, starve for a week or so, then land this job washin' dishes at a restaurant called William's, owned by this guy named Bill Finley."

"Finley. Wasn't he at the din-

ner the other night?"

"Yeah. That was all Mrs. Woodward's doin'. If I'd known, there's no way I would've worked that gig. But she's not a lady I can afford to cross, know what I mean? And when I hear Booker's the goddam guest of honor, I'm thinkin' somebody's tryin' to drive me totally nuts."

"What about the third chef?"

"Name's Jon Wilson. He's new up here. Just opened a place in Saratoga called Charades. You musta heard of it."

Henri nodded. "Haven't checked it out yet, though."

"He's already got a rep. Did some nice things the other night. Anyways, like I was sayin', I worked for this Finley as a dishwasher, then bussed tables and eventually wound up in the kitchen full time as a prep cook. That lasted about five years. I picked up a lot, y'know? Covered ground for the cooks that I didn't have to, improved my position, understand? So, when one of the cooks quits, I think this is my big chance to move up in the ranks. But Finley goes and hires this college kid right outta nowhere, meaning Phil Booker, right? He comes in and right off starts throwin' his weight around. I mean, nobody liked him. We mixed it up more than a few times, and I even had it out with Finley himself before I jumped ship. I knew

Booker'd go down hard someday."

Henri had a simple question running through his head like an electric current, but there was no way to ask it without blowing his already flimsy cover. He could only hope that it would answer itself as the afternoon wore on.

Who the hell was this Philip Booker?

"I can see you're all broken up," he said.

"Hey! It won't keep me awake nights, right? But believe me, I'm just one of many in this area that feels like that. Booker didn't make no friends here, buddy. Everybody he ever came near's got a story, I bet. Look at me. If I get that job he beat me out of, maybe by now I own my own place instead of still climbin' the goddam ladder, understand? Took me a long, long time to get out from under Finley's badmouthin', let me tell you."

"But you wouldn't have slipped him a mushroom Mickey."

"Christ, if Finley and those nearsighted old bags couldn't tell good mushrooms from bad, it ain't my fault. I only know how to cook the things. I took their word that it was all safe."

Anton finally located the list and handed it to Henri. "And listen, buddy. Don't get your

hopes up. Like I said, if I made a list of everybody who hated Booker, I'd run out of paper before I ran out of names. He made friends like I make money."

It was after three thirty by the time Henri got to William's Restaurant, an ivy-covered old stone house near the shores of Saratoga Lake. He and Laura had been there a few times, though they had never met the owner and Henri couldn't recall anything special about the food. With more than fifty restaurants of various quality in Saratoga itself, and hundreds more within easy driving distance, they had neither the time nor the appetites to become friendly with every owner. Besides, despite his culinary forays, Henri had to admit that he usually preferred Saratoga's smaller diners and cafes to these fancy places. Something in his working class background rebelled against the idea of paying twice as much to have his drink weakened by mineral water instead of tap.

Henri discovered William Finley in his office, listing checks on a bank deposit slip. He had passed through the kitchen while searching for the owner, and noticed that the atmosphere was just a bit more harried than it had been at

Chateau D'Orville. The staff was beginning to acquire that panicky edge that would be needed to crank out meal after meal at the height of the dinner rush.

When Henri introduced himself, William Finley, a dignified looking man of sixty-five or seventy, politely expressed his deep distress over the tragedy. But Henri saw in his eyes a cool detachment, like that of a sympathetic undertaker. Finley said he had no extra copies of his menu, but would write one out if Henri could wait a minute.

Henri sat in a rickety chair near the desk and watched Finley search through one of the drawers, then extract a sheet of paper.

"Mr. Finley, I hear Phil Booker worked for you many years ago."

William sighed and nodded. "That was before his current fame and fortune, long before. You've been talking to Anton, I gather. He's never forgiven me. I'm not proud of my behavior in that episode. I haven't made many mistakes in this business, but I made a couple of doozies with those two boys, especially Mr. Booker."

"How did you come to hire him? Booker, I mean. Anton talked like the guy appeared out of thin air," said Henri, still wondering about that "fame

and fortune" business.

"Almost. Oh, there's no denying Phil Booker had a certain amount of natural ability. But he was also an egomaniacal clod. He walked on people, used them to his own ends and then discarded them. Twenty years ago, as Anton no doubt already told you, I gave Mr. Booker his first real break in this business. Right out of college. He was a theater major, for God's sake. His only experience was a part-time job in a New York deli. He had, however, a letter of recommendation from a well-known chef who will remain nameless. Mr. Booker told me the chef was a friend of the family and had taught him a great deal. The letter extolled the young man's potential, his natural talent, and his drive. It said nothing about his inability to get along with people or to take orders. As it turned out, he had forged the letter anyway. I should have checked it before hiring him, but I was more naive in those days. When I called afterward, just out of curiosity, that chef had, of course, never heard of any Phil Booker."

"And in the meantime Anton had quit."

"Yes. The great irony is that Mr. Booker now works for that same restaurant in New York. He replaced the chef whose recommendation he had forged

years before. And have you ever watched his television show?"

"Television?"

"I never miss it, like a penance, you might say. Mr. Booker enjoys telling amusing stories about the stupid things people taught him when he was first learning to cook. I regret to say that ninety percent of those stories were culled from his years with me. I'm something of a laughing-stock in this area now, in the profession anyway. Of course he doesn't use my name on the air, but everyone knows. And then there's the matter of the recipes. Did Anton mention the recipes?"

"No."

"From everyone he ever worked with, Mr. Booker stole. His mind was a sponge. That book of his that came out this year, the one tied in with his show? What was the title?"

Henri shrugged. He always used old cookbooks himself. Food fads didn't interest him. Finley turned to a bookshelf on his left and ran a finger along the spines, many of which were flour-coated. Finally he stopped and extracted a garish red, yellow, and blue cookbook.

"Oh yes, how could I forget? *Eats of Eden*. Ludicrous title, don't you think? I've gone through this book many times, as I'm sure have others with whom he worked over the years.

Any of us can probably pick a half-dozen recipes of our own that he stole, then altered ever so slightly and published as his creations. The man never had an original idea in his entire life. He was like . . . like a musician, I suppose. He could read the notes of a recipe and play it fluently with his utensils, but he was no composer. Ask Anton. Ask Jon."

"What about Jon?"

"He's a more recent victim. He worked with Mr. Booker in that New York restaurant where they film the TV show. He was fired last spring for insubordination. Seems Jon told Mr. Booker exactly what he thought of him in front of the entire staff. And you just can't treat a star like that."

Henri checked his watch and knew he'd better be going if he intended to get to Jon's place before the dinner rush. He thanked Finley for his help and left.

Driving back to Saratoga from the lake, Henri entered the city on Union Avenue and drove past the thoroughbred track and stables. Less than a month ago, this area had been practically impassable with its crowds and traffic jams every race day. Now it was more like a ghost town, the stable area on the right side of the street silent and devoid of any activity, the

grandstand building on the left as empty as an abandoned old warehouse. The city was still recovering from the August invasion, licking its wounds, counting up its profits.

Charades was one of those establishments that had not yet decided what it really wanted to be. Located in a small building on Broadway, its lunch crowd was primarily from the downtown business community, but at dinner the menu and prices climbed into the more rarefied air of an upper class clientele, only to be supplanted one more time after eleven o'clock. Then Charades underwent its final metamorphosis of the day, and was rapidly becoming the most popular night-spot in town for Skidmore College students.

The kitchen was already in a state of organized chaos. He had timed his arrival badly. Cooks and waitresses rushed about as if the room were on fire. When Henri asked for the owner, one of the passing furies gestured toward the right-hand wall, where two gas stoves stood under a large hood fan. All the burners were fired and most of them were in use. Jon Wilson was at that moment shaking a sauté pan over the heat, vegetables sizzling in oil and occasionally erupting in flames. Simultaneously, he was keep-

ing an eye on several other pots and pans and shouting orders to his workers, sending them away on a variety of missions, all of which sounded of the utmost importance and urgency.

Henri approached tentatively. "Excuse me, Mr. . . ."

"Yeah? What's up?" he asked, somehow managing to look at Henri and the stove at the same time. "You bring me those chickens, man? They said you'd be here at noon."

Henri shook his head. He mumbled something about the police and the poisoning, speaking clearly only when he came to the part concerned with getting Jon's menu.

"I got no time right now, man. I'm buried. You have a paper and pencil?"

Jon turned quickly away from the stove, nearly grazing Henri's arm with the hot pan as he swung past. One of Jon's assistants was right there waiting with two dinner plates, on each of which half a roast duckling lay next to a generous scoop of brown rice. This allowed room only for the vegetables. Deftly Jon poured the pan's contents onto the plates, somehow making the piles evenly divided down to the last onion.

The assistant added an orange slice and a parsley sprig to each plate as a garnish, then

hurried away. Jon was already back at the stove, shaking a couple of the other pans, checking under the lid of a saucepan. Another order was called out to him by the salad girl in the corner, who was reading off order slips delivered to her by the waitresses. Without acknowledging the call, he reached into a cooler nearby and took out two pieces of sirloin.

In the middle of all this Jon still managed to dictate the list of dishes he had prepared for the Woodward party. Henri decided not to press for more than that under the circumstances.

Laura sat with her mother for almost three hours, trying to persuade her to take a nap. When she finally relinquished and closed her eyes, Laura covered her with a blanket and returned to the parlor, where only Mac remained. He was sitting on a loveseat near the fireplace, drinking from a teacup, his feet up on the red velvet cushion.

"Mother would have you shot if she saw those shoes on her furniture, Mac."

"Oops." He dropped his feet clumsily to the carpet. "You can dress some people up . . . How's she doing?"

"Sleeping now. I don't think she's had much of that since this all began."

"Here," said Mac, reaching for a silver pot and another cup. "That Mr. Saunders brought me some coffee. Laura, if I'd known this was your family, I maybe could've worked something out, you know."

Laura accepted the cup and saucer. She shook her head. "Thanks, Mac, but no special treatment is necessary. You just do what you have to."

"Your mother have anything to say?"

"Only what little she knows. That Philip Booker was a charming young celebrity, and that they had a marvelous time until now."

Mac nodded. "Yeah, same story I got from the ladies. And I believe every word of it, if that's what worries her."

Laura shook her head again. "In her heart, I'm certain she doesn't think you suspect anyone in the club of anything worse than poor judgment in picking the mushrooms. But these ladies guard their reputations like crown jewels, Mac. They're terrified of any stain, and the publicity from all this will have social reverberations, in a manner of speaking. Of course they're distressed for Mr. Booker, too. Have you heard from the hospital recently?"

"I called a few minutes ago. Talked to one of the docs. It's just about hopeless. When

Booker was brought in, he was already suffering from, if you'll pardon the grisly details, a burning gut, vomiting, fainting spells, body cramps, the works. Now he's starting to have some breathing troubles. They say the symptoms might ease up for a day or so, but at most he probably won't live out the week. They did what they could, pumped him out and whatever, but the mushrooms were already well digested and the poison had spread throughout his system."

"How ghastly."

"The doctors, knowing about this dinner the other night, have, of course, no doubt that it was mushroom poisoning. They called it probable *amanita-toxin* poisoning, from what we call toadstools and they call *Amanita phalloides*. They said it's the villain in about ninety percent of all mushroom poisoning cases."

"Have you spoken with the cooks?"

"No, not personally. I just sent a couple of my boys out for a preliminary visit, to let them know what's up. Having all that time pass since the dinner doesn't help much as far as evidence goes."

"I don't know if you'll be too thrilled to hear this, Mac, but Henri also made the rounds this afternoon. He might be

home by now. I was going to have Saunders take me home, but if you'll do the honors, it might be worthwhile for the three of us to compare notes. In anticipation of murder, you might say."

Henri was sitting at the desk in the study when they arrived. He was nearly hidden behind two stacks of cookbooks. On his lap was a clipboard and a yellow legal pad. He was copying down something from one of the books.

"Welcome home, kids. What's new, Mac?"

"Nothing at all, Henri. Just thought I'd stop by to say hello, that's all. You planning dinner?"

Henri shook his head. "I got the party menus from those chefs this afternoon. I'm just looking up recipes similar to theirs for a comparison of basic characteristics and ingredients. Might turn up something. You never know."

"Good idea," said Mac.

Henri looked at Laura. "How's she doing?" It was the closest he could get to a sympathetic question about her mother.

"She'll be okay, I think. A bit shocked, of course."

Laura and Mac sat down in the two armchairs in front of the desk and began talking

about the case, comparing her mother's version of the events to those of the other members of the club. Henri divided his attention among listening to them, reading, and writing. He only glanced up when Laura began describing the victim in glowing terms.

"Whoa! Time out. Are we talking about the same person here? The nearly deceased Phil Booker?"

"Of course. Why?"

Mac nodded his agreement. "The ladies all described him in much the same way: charming, intelligent, kind."

Henri shook his head and grinned. "You've obviously been listening to the wrong crowd. An equally brief list of Philip Booker's dominant personality traits, as provided by the local culinary establishment, would replace the words charming, intelligent, and kind with ego-maniacal, parasitic, and cruel. We better get some fingerprints, Mac. I think we're talking about two different guys."

Henri told them what he had learned during the afternoon, which left Mac and Laura shaking their heads in confusion.

"It's probably not that odd, when you come right down to it," said Mac. "Booker wouldn't be the first chiseler to suck up to a bunch of gullible old broads. No offense, Laura."

Her expression hovered somewhere between a polite smile and a glare, then softened as her mind moved on to more important matters. "What about the fact that Booker was the only guest poisoned? Does that make sense in terms of logistics? Everyone ate the same food. If somebody was going to poison Mr. Booker, he would have to be awfully careful not to get more victims than he bargained for, or even the wrong victim altogether. And Mr. Booker knew wild mushrooms himself. After all the inspections they were subjected to, I don't see how a significant number of bad ones could have just slipped through."

Henri glanced up from his book again. "If it was attempted murder, it had to be one of the three chefs, right? All of them seem to have sufficient motive, but only one had enough screws loose to actually pull it off. This party was just too good an opportunity for him to pass up. Booker is, from what I hear, at the height of his popularity right now: the TV show, his bestselling cookbook, a prestigious job in a fine New York restaurant. Would there ever be a better chance for revenge than your mother's party? Booker could be killed not only in the presence of multiple suspects, but also with the possi-

bility that maybe it really was just an unfortunate accident."

Mac lit a cigarette. "One of the ladies told me it was pretty hectic in that kitchen all day. Along with the cooks and their helpers, Booker and most of the guests kept running in and out to check on their progress and to second-guess methods of preparation. So there was more than enough distraction and confusion in there for anything to happen."

"But . . ." said Henri, reaching for another cookbook, his old favorite, *Larousse Gastronomique*, "we still have the not-so-minor detail of how the bad mushrooms were planted in one particular dish, and in such a way that only Booker would eat them, without noticing anything suspicious. So the murderer had to find a way to get that specific food into Booker's mouth while serving a buffet-style dinner. I read somewhere that you'd need at least twenty grams of poison mushrooms to do the trick."

Laura handed Mac an ashtray. "As far as serving is concerned, part of the floor show that night was for the chefs to be standing behind the banquet tables, doling out portions and describing each of their creations. All three of them were in a position to influence who received what."

"Hmmm . . ." Henri turned a page of the *Larousse*, then glanced at his clipboard. "I think we can probably eliminate any dish that was served to the guests from a communal container like a salad bowl or casserole or chafing dish, as well as the finger foods at cocktail hour, over which the cooks had no service control."

"That must involve a good share of the meal," said Laura.

"It would mean dropping, let's see, the Mushroom Bisque, three kinds of salad, Stewed Mushrooms, Champignons Flambé, Mushrooms au Gratin, French-Styled Baked Mushrooms, Mushrooms in Marsala Wine, Kidneys and Mushrooms with Pasta, the three casseroles made with chicken, zucchini, and broccoli, Mushroom Pie, Paprika Mushrooms . . ."

Henri was drawing lines through the names on his list.

"What does that leave?" asked Mac, butting his cigarette in the ashtray.

"Not a hell of a lot. Just Mushroom Patties, Tiny Mushroom Soufflés, Mushroom Tarts, and Mushroom Piroshki."

"That must eliminate somebody from our suspect list," said Laura.

Henri checked his notes. "Guess again. William made the piroshki, Jon the tarts and soufflés, and Anton the patties.

Right back where we started."

Mac shook his head. "And we still don't even know how he managed to slip at least twenty grams, and probably a hell of a lot more, of poisonous mushrooms into a single item without attracting Booker's attention when he ate it. Henri?"

Absorbed in his studies, Henri didn't look up for several moments. When he finally did, he was grinning. "How, you ask? I'll lay odds on page 636, Mac."

He dropped the heavy book on the desktop and spun it around so they could read a section he had just marked with his pen.

Mac wasn't sure his superiors would approve, but the plan made enough sense to go along with until something better came up. Laura had convinced her mother to arrange a small dinner for the three chefs, scheduling it on a Monday night when all their restaurants were closed. This involved a delay of six days, but since Philip Booker was still clinging tenaciously to life in the hospital, and the newspapers so far were treating it as an unfortunate accident, there did not seem to be any need to rush things.

Before Laura's mother grudgingly extended her invi-

tations to "those fools," one of whom she was certain had made a stupid and deadly error, Mac called them all and let it be known that he expected them to attend. He said he needed their assistance in recalling the events of the dinner and this would be the most convenient way of getting them all together.

Henri generously offered to do the cooking, but Laura insisted on a catered affair, since it was also Mrs. Woodward's cook's night off. The dinner was held in the secondary dining room. There were only six guests: Laura, her mother, Mac, and the three chefs.

The meal was served with a nervous flourish by the caterer, who appeared to be both delighted and intimidated by his clients. Every time he left the room, his colleagues grumbled about his work.

Mac served as moderator, explaining to the chefs much of what he had discovered thus far, as well as his suspicion that Philip Booker's poisoning hadn't been as accidental as the media was portraying it. He said that the main reason he had asked them there was to solicit their opinions on a theory he was developing.

"I'd like to toss something out to you guys, see what you think of the possibilities. As cooks I

mean. Now it's pretty obvious at this point that the murderer had to get the poison mushrooms into something he could serve to Booker specifically, without any risk of hurting the others. I've narrowed the possibilities down to four items: soufflés, piroshki, tarts, and patties."

Mac stared hard at the creator of each one as he spoke its name. They all flinched in turn. "While I was thumbing through some cookbooks, checking out ingredients, I happened to come across an interesting recipe for a concoction called Mushroom Powder. Seems it's used like any spice, to add flavor to the dish you're cooking. It's pretty simple stuff. You just slice up some mushrooms, bake 'em, and, when they've dried out, pulverize them with a mortar and pestle. So I got to thinking, if the mushrooms being used happened to be phalloides, for instance, and you used enough of them, you'd have kind of a powdered death. What do you guys think?"

Jon laughed. "What should we think? Of course it makes sense, man. We've all ground our own spices on occasion for special dishes. And obviously we all have a mortar and pestle. Any decent kitchen does. But it seems to me you're right back where you started. I mean, all

of us were here, making potentially lethal dishes, all of us have some kind of motive, and all of us have the know-how and equipment."

Mac smiled, then shrugged. "I guess you're right, but only one of you has a mortar and pestle that was used to grind up poison mushrooms. Now even if you washed the equipment out thoroughly, I'm betting the lab boys can find traces of the lethal substance on them. That's another reason why I asked you all here tonight. I sent one of my boys around to your homes and restaurants to confiscate all mortars and pestles in sight. Just thought it best to do so when you weren't there to ... interfere."

"You can't just ..." Anton sputtered, but Mac waved him silent.

"I can and I have."

The chefs erupted in a single, furious voice of protest, but were silenced again by Henri's appearance in the doorway.

"Sarge, sorry to butt in. You said to let you know when I got back. I left those things you wanted on the front seat of your car, okay? They're all in marked plastic bags."

"Thanks. I'll drop 'em off at the station later. Take the rest of the night off."

Henri vanished. Mac turned back to the chefs. "Sorry for the

interruption, gentlemen. And sorry also for the secrecy."

The shouting started once more. Mac rested his face wearily against his hand and waited for the storm to subside. Laura glanced at her mother, who was still staring openmouthed at the doorway where Henri had been moments before, like an apparition. She seemed to be trying to decide if what she had seen was what she thought she had seen. Laura thought it best to let the incident remain a mystery.

Mrs. Woodward composed herself and rapped her knuckles on the table, which surprisingly caused all three chefs to stop yelling at the same time.

"Gentlemen, please. If you can control yourselves, there will be coffee and brandy served in the parlor in ten minutes. If you'll excuse us, I've been asked to show Detective McKerney the room where Mr. Booker was staying upstairs. We shall join you shortly. Please make yourselves at home."

"Let's continue this little chat over coffee, okay, guys?" Mac added, as everyone stood.

Laura, her mother, and Mac exited through the door to the hallway. The chefs headed for the kitchen, still growling among themselves, apparently ready to vent their anger on the helpless caterer.

Once out of the dining room, Mrs. Woodward excused herself and went into seclusion in her upstairs bedroom. Mac and Laura headed for the greenhouse and a seldom-used exit from the house. Mac followed Laura across the moonlit lawn and through a small maze of high hedges. When they emerged near the carriage barn, she spotted Henri lurking in the shadows, and they hurried over to join him.

"You booking bets on this one?" asked Mac.

"Against the law," Henri whispered.

They waited five minutes. The cloudless sky allowed a full moon to illuminate the parking area. Crystals in the marble chips sparkled. A slight breeze rustled the oak leaves and stirred wind chimes over by the greenhouse.

At first they couldn't see him, but heard the sound of hesitant footsteps on crushed stone. Then the silhouette of a head appeared near the hood of the Cavanaughs' Mercedes. Crouching behind the car, the figure seemed to be gauging the distance between his hiding place and Mac's car, an open space of a dozen yards or so.

Another long minute passed. Time was running out. Finally the silhouette, still crouching, scurried across the opening and

reached for the police car door.

"Freeze! Police!" shouted Mac, rushing from cover. The Cavanaugh's followed.

The shadow figure, poised momentarily to flee, thought better of it and stood his ground. Something fell from his hand and clattered on the stones.

Mac shone a flashlight and the shadow suddenly had a face, Anton's fleshy face, looking thoroughly scared and defeated. Training the light on the driveway, Mac located the item that had fallen from Anton's grasp, a mortar and pestle. He had just stolen them moments before from Mrs. Woodward's kitchen, planning to switch them with the ones in the plastic bag marked with his name.

Mac returned the light to Anton's face, told him to put his hands on the car and spread his legs. When he began reciting the Miranda warnings, Henri draped his arm around Laura's shoulders and they walked back to the house.

"S he doesn't even let me in the damn kitchen!" Henri complained as he entered the study with a tray on which mugs, a coffee pot, and some fresh Danish had been neatly laid out. "I almost had to slug her just so I could bring

this tray in here myself."

Laura shook her head and smiled. "Poor baby. Givè Stella a chance. It's her first day. She has to get acclimated. If you can control yourself for a second, I just had a call from Mac. He wanted to thank us again for last night. Also, Philip Booker is still holding on, so murder isn't the operative word here yet."

"Nothing like solving them before they happen. Shame about Booker, though. Did Mac check to see if the lab guys could actually have picked up traces of *Amanita phalloides* on a mortar and pestle?"

"He didn't say. It would be icing on the cake at this point, anyway. Anton made a full confession last night. What a strange man. I was just thinking. If he'd spread the poison around a bit and killed one of the others, or even made a few of them a little sick, there would have been much more reason to think it might be accidental. Yet he didn't take that chance. He gambled with his own life instead of those of Mother and her friends."

Henri sipped his coffee. "Something else is strange about this case. Anton is guilty, yet every one of those guys had the motive and ability to carry out this scheme. For a while there I wondered if it might be a con-

spiracy, but if Anton's taking the rap there's not much we can do on that score. He seems to have just been unlucky in beating them to a punch they all could have thrown. Speaking of punches, how's your mother handling this?"

"She'll survive. Now that the media have this new bone to chew on, the story will be re-born for a couple of weeks. Mother's pretty shaken up about that, refusing to go out of the house and such. But her ego will get the better of her eventually and this will become yet another grand story for her to tell on the local tea circuit."

Henri grinned; picked up a Danish, and took a small, tentative bite, followed immediately by a larger one. Laura could tell that he was impressed with Stella's baking prowess, but knew he wasn't ready yet to admit defeat.

Henri returned the pastry to

the tray and screwed up his face as if he'd just eaten a lemon. "If we'd hired Monique, we could've had fresh croissants every morning."

"That I sincerely doubt," said Laura. "But you'll be pleased to hear that Stella makes croissants, too, as well as dozens of Italian pastries. She's extremely versatile. And she promised to do some croissants just for you tomorrow."

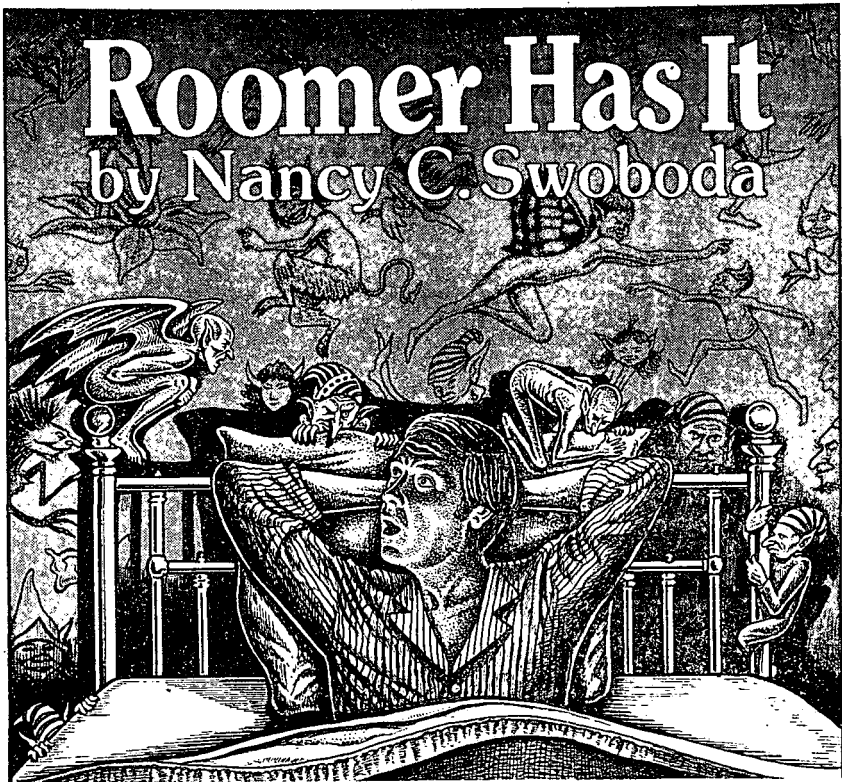
"Laura, she's just not that great. This isn't by any stretch of the imagination the best Danish I've ever had. And she is definitely a fascist. I bet I'll never get to cook in that kitchen again."

"Oh, no," said Laura, putting the back of her hand to her forehead in mock horror.

"Laugh if you want to, kid. But I say there's gonna be war," Henri said as he reached for the Danish again and took another hearty bite.

Roomer Has It

by Nancy C. Swoboda



“Gawd! What luck,” said T.J. Pike to himself. It seemed as if nothing he did could go wrong. The sign was one of those bright red metal ones from the dime store: ROOM FOR RENT. The house was an old shambling frame house, large and still imposing in its moldering grandeur. It sat on a small patch of well-kept lawn, with a wrought-iron fence that

defied further encroachment by commercial property.

T.J. looked back at the downtown skyline. With a room here, he would have only a three block walk to the outdoor parking lot where he'd landed a job. That was *plenty* lucky. After what had happened, he couldn't stand to be cooped up for too long at a time. In fact, he was damn lucky to get a job at all, given the notoriety he had had.

Illustration by Peter D. Fasolino

The place looked kind of run-down, but he was drawn to it. People who kept up their yard usually kept a pretty good house, he reasoned. No fleabag flops for him!

The wooden porch creaked under his stocky frame. He rang the doorbell and heard chimes echo far back in the house. Almost immediately the door opened and an elderly couple materialized in the dim rectangle of light as if they'd expected him. T.J. rubbed a hand over his coarse features and pointed at the sign.

"Room still for rent?"

The old man answered in a high wheezy voice. "Of course. Come in."

"Yeah. But first . . . how much?"

"Fifty dollars a week, including linens and breakfast."

"Sounds okay. Lemme see the room."

"Fine. Come in now, young man." The old man opened the screen door and stepped aside. His wife smiled, but T.J. noticed that her face still seemed blank, like a bowl of oatmeal with two raisins. With gray braids across the top, her head was a perfect circle.

The old man motioned to the stairway that went straight up along the left side of the front hall.

"You go first. It's the second door to your right. We'll follow,

but it takes us a little more time, doesn't it, Faustina?" He looked at his wife, and she nodded her round gray head.

T.J. was right. The inside of the house was old style but clean and polished. The dark wood paneling glowed and smelled of lemon oil. The red plush carpet was spotless, and the crystal chandelier glittered even in the dim light. He took the stairs two at a time, turned at the top, and waited for the old couple. For some reason it gave him the creeps to look down into those two faces slowly moving up towards him. The old man looked like a sleepy mole with a burr haircut, and the old lady made him nervous. It surprised him when she spoke. Her voice was low and pleasant.

"We hope you'll like the room, don't we, Thaddeus?" When she glanced at her husband, her expression came alive.

"Well, I'm ready if you are. Let's see it." T.J. followed them to the closed door. He looked at them, but they just stood watching him. He was pretty good at figuring people, but this pair was something else. After what seemed an eternity of suspended animation he took the initiative.

He opened the door into a large, high ceilinged room with massive furniture and heavy, floor-length drapes. A double bed stood against the far wall,

with a closet to the right of it. There was one tall window in the wall to the left, a bureau against the opposite wall, and a large chair just inside and to the right of the door. The red plush carpet extended into the room, red velvet drapes continued the color up the wall, and a matching bedspread completed the sanguinary decor. And there was the wallpaper.

"Gawd!" said T.J. "What is this? A nursery?"

The old couple looked at each other knowingly. Thaddeus replied to T.J.'s outspoken question.

"Oh my, no. This is very fine paper and original to the room. It is unusual, isn't it? Do you believe in things like witchcraft, superstition?"

"Maybe a little salt over my left shoulder, but nothin' else. Why?"

The old man smiled softly. "Then it won't bother you if I tell you the history of the paper. The pattern is called 'Devil's Children.' The artist who did the original etchings dabbled in the occult and was said to have conjured up the design through black magic. It's rather a collector's item."

The once white wallpaper was now parchment color flecked with a red that had not faded. A larger pattern of groupings of storybook characters covered the walls like hundreds of small

frameless pictures. They stood frozen in an ageless pose, their colors paled almost to ghostly outlines. There were trolls, elves, wicked looking children, satyrs with cloven hooves, all watching the room and each other with sightless eyes.

"Geezus! I don't know if I can go this or not. Got any other rooms for rent?" T.J. scratched his thinning black hair and shook his head.

"No. No we don't. This is the only one available to you," wheezed Thaddeus.

"It's really a very nice room. Perhaps you won't notice the wallpaper . . . after a time," added Faustina encouragingly.

"Okay, okay." T.J. dug into his pocket. "Here's fifty. I'll try it for at least a week. Do I get a key?"

"Oh, yes," said Thaddeus. "As you know, our first names are Thaddeus and Faustina. The last name is Legare, and we'd prefer you use that. Here's your key, Mr. Pike. You can move in right away. Breakfast is at seven thirty." He ushered his wife out of the room and closed the door behind them.

Funny, he didn't recall having told them his name. Oh well, the rent was right and the accommodations were to his liking, clean and lots of space. Secure in the knowledge that everything was going his way, T.J. went down to the bus depot

to get his bag out of storage. Those two old toads would really hop around if they knew they had a murderer for a roomer.

It was late by the time he got back to the house and unpacked his suitcase. The big bureau was more than adequate to hold his belongings. He noticed how scrupulously clean all the linens and bedding were. That suited him just fine after that hellhole prison he was in. He hoped he'd never see another cockroach or rat as long as he lived.

He turned on the small portable radio he had bought at the drugstore, lit a cigarette, and lay back on the big bed. It was soft. Good. Well, here he was, free of a wife who deserved just what she got and scot-free of the law. He could still hear her yelling at him, nagging, picking at him constantly. Bitch! She would have never let him go.

It had taken what little he had (but it was worth it) for the lawyer who had questioned him, hounded him over every detail, until he had discovered that T.J. had never been advised of his rights. Something to do with someone named Miranda. Hell! Rights were something he'd given up when he'd married Evelyn. The minute they were man and wife, she'd turned into a shrew.

There had been no question of his guilt. The night they had

had their loud and last fight, the police were there only minutes after he'd shut her up with a hammer, thanks to neighbors who hadn't tolerated the racket. But now, T.J. had his rights, and he intended to take every advantage of them.

For a while he planned to drift from job to job until something promising showed up. Then he'd settle down and work at it . . . providing it was to his liking. And as for women . . . well, they could go jump. It was his show now, and nobody was going to spoil it. After all, how many people commit murder and go free? The technicalities of the law and a smart lawyer had worked to his advantage. He was lucky, all right. Nothing could go wrong now. He smiled, thumbed his nose at the figures in the wallpaper, and went to sleep.

The smell of bacon, cinnamon, and coffee penetrated the stout door and made his nostrils twitch. Gawd! He hadn't smelled those smells since he was a boy on the farm. Refreshed from a deep sleep, T.J. rolled out of bed and dressed. If there were other roomers afoot, he was going to be first at that breakfast.

He padded down the red plush stairs and followed his nose to the kitchen. It was a big room with yellow walls and bright curtains. A large round table was set, but only with three

places. Mrs. Legare was just taking a coffee cake out of the oven.

"Good morning, Mr. Pike." Her muddy brown eyes looked deeply into his and then away.

"Morning." He sat down eagerly and watched her deftly cut the steaming cake into equal squares.

She handed him the platter. "Mr. Legare has done his usual research. He'll be wanting to talk to you this morning."

Oh-oh, thought T.J. Here it comes. It no doubt had something to do with his being a murderer. Well, if they wanted to throw him out, they'd have to give him ample notice. That was another law in his favor. He shrugged and reached for a piece of coffee cake.

Mr. Legare left little time for T.J. to speculate. "Good morning, Mr. Pike. I trust you enjoyed a restful night?"

"Yeah. As a matter of fact, I did."

"Mr. Pike, you must know that Faustina—Mrs. Legare—and I keep close watch on whom we admit to our home." The mole-like face remained friendly.

T.J. clanked his cup back into the saucer. "I got an idea what you're going to say."

"Now, now, Mr. Pike. Hear me out. We know what . . . who you are, and it's just fine."

"Fine? I don't get it. What are

you driving at? I can demand to stay here, you know." Confidently, he quoted his legal rights as a tenant.

Faustina put another piece of coffee cake on T.J.'s plate. "What Thaddeus is saying, Mr. Pike, is that we'd like you to stay."

"Yes, that's right. If you choose to stay, knowing that we're aware of your past, then it's your decision entirely."

T.J. scratched his head. "If you two think I need saving or something, forget it."

"Oh my, no," smiled Mr. Legare. "It's just our way of putting our guests at ease." The sleepy mole eyes darted to his wife's nodding round head.

T.J. stood up and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. "I'm not saying I believe you. There's got to be an angle someplace, but at least you've saved me a lot of explanations later on."

Mrs. Legare beamed. "There now. See? We've made things easier for you. It's been our pleasure for many years to take care of your kind."

All day at the parking lot T.J. tried to figure out the Legares. What did they mean "his kind"? Did they run some kind of shabby operation? Hell. He wasn't hot. And he wondered at himself, why he picked that place to hang his hat. Gawd! Maybe they had religion, thought they could save him.

Well, they'd be wasting their time. He had no regrets.

That night he took his pay advance and went out on the town. He had a steak and quite a few drinks. When he got back to the old house it was dark save for one night light just inside the door. It made his shadow lurch and loom ahead of him as he climbed the stairs. Once inside his room, T.J. flipped on the light just long enough to change into his pajamas.

Something caught the corner of his eye as he walked past the mirror on the bureau. He knew that it must be his own reflection, but he could swear that he'd seen the figures in the wallpaper move. He'd probably had too much booze, but before he turned off the light he looked carefully at all four walls. Everything was still. Satisfied, he dropped into bed and a deep sleep.

It seemed when he awoke that he'd been asleep for hours, but the luminous dial on his watch said it was half past three. He was still groggy, but he could remember that something had disturbed him. It had been a sensation like . . . like when the rats used to run over his bed when he was in prison. Gawd! He jumped up and turned on the lights. Cautiously, he poked at the covers, but there was nothing there but soft blankets and spotlessly white sheets.

Whew! He lit a cigarette and sat down in the chair.

Well, one of two things could be possible, he figured. He was either having prison D.T.'s like he'd heard tell about, or he couldn't handle his liquor. Maybe it was a little of both. Fine way to start out his new life, jumping at shadows. By damn, nothing and nobody was going to cramp his style! He snubbed out his cigarette and flopped into bed.

He slept through the rest of the night and welcomed the smells of breakfast that woke him in the morning. As he went down the hall to the bathroom he counted four more doors, two on either side. He slowed down and listened for sounds of other roomers, but there was only silence. Boldly, he tried the knob on one of the doors. It was locked. He wondered how many other people really did live in this house and if their wallpaper was as wild as his.

Freshly shaved and showered, he felt a great sense of well-being as he strode into the kitchen.

"Good morning, Mr. Pike. I trust from the looks of you that you spent a good night." Mrs. Legare handed him a large glass of orange juice.

"Yeah. I did." T.J. sat down. "Am I the only one for breakfast again?"

Faustina turned her blank

look on him. "Yes." Then she busied herself at the stove.

As before, Mr. Legare appeared quietly and sat down at the table. "Well, Mr. Pike, how do you like your accommodations with us by now?"

"Just fine. Only thing I can't get worked up about is that wallpaper. If any of your other rooms open up, I'd sure like to make a change."

Mr. Legare nodded. "It's not likely, but we'll keep it in mind."

The three of them ate in silence until Thaddeus lit up a cigar. T.J. turned down the offer of one in favor of his own cigarettes.

"Tell me, Mr. Pike, as a purely academic question, may I ask you about your recent experience?"

"I don't get you with this 'academic' stuff." T.J. was immediately on guard.

"What I'd like to ask," Mr. Legare said quietly, "is, if you had the opportunity, would you do it again?"

"Oh, I get it. You mean, would I bump off my old lady? You bet, but only if I knew it would work out the same way for *me*, of course." He laughed at his own little joke.

"Yes, of course." Mr. Legare looked at him curiously through a cloud of cigar smoke.

"Sometime, when there's just the two of us," T.J. excluded Mrs. Legare with a nod, "I can

tell you stories about prison that'll curl your hair. Right now, I'd better mosey on over to the parking lot."

As he stood up and turned to leave, he saw that both Mr. and Mrs. Legare were watching him intently. Their eyes seemed to sparkle with pleasure. He supposed they were excited over the idea of having a roomer with such an interesting life under their drab roof. He did rather fancy himself as a celebrity.

That night after work, T.J. couldn't quite face going back to his room. He had a sandwich and a couple of beers, and caught a movie. Afterwards, he walked around the downtown area and then headed home. All that fresh air had made him sleepy. He was glad he hadn't had much to drink because he was too tired to cope with any hallucinations tonight.

As usual, the house was quiet, too quiet. The shadows seemed to be waiting, watching him, and he knew then by animal instinct that he was the sole roomer. Why? The Legares had welcomed him with open arms despite his unsavory reputation, led him to believe there were other tenants. The shabby neighborhood probably had something to do with it, and one look at those two weirdos had almost put *him* off when they first opened the door.

As he climbed the stairs, he tried to shrug off his apprehension by reasoning that the Legares were grateful for his patronage and didn't want to let on that they had trouble attracting a full house. It suited him all right. The place was clean, the food was good, and they didn't appear to mind that he was a murderer. If anything, they were curious.

He rather liked the idea of being the only roomer, the way they catered to him, and by the time he opened the door to his room he felt better about the situation. Even the wallpaper didn't bother him because tomorrow morning he'd demand to be moved, and he knew he'd get his way.

After he got into bed he left the light on for a while. He lay on his back and studied the figures. They all looked evil, faded, yet in a way distinct, luminous. Sober as he was, he could swear that some of them had changed positions from the last time he'd looked. With a shudder he got up and turned off the light.

He spent a restless night, dropping off, then starting at the faint sounds of laughter, staccato giggles, only to rouse fully and hear nothing. It was the tangible sense of activity in the room that caused him to sit up in bed and turn the light back on until dawn. Either they let him have another room to-

day or those old kooks were going to lose their star boarder!

T.J. took a long, hot shower, dressed, and went down to the kitchen where Thaddeus and Faustina sat over coffee at the table. Before they went into any morning pleasantries he lodged his complaint. "I want to change rooms or I'm leaving."

Mr. Legare spoke slowly, patiently. "You have our best accommodations now, Mr. Pike . . . and none of the other rooms is available."

"Don't give me that," T.J. made an impatient gesture with his hand. "I'm onto you two."

There was silence as the old couple's eyes met, and T.J. knew he had them. He pressed on:

"You don't have to put up a front for me . . . just because I'm your only customer."

"You're right," sighed Mr. Legare. "We don't attract much business in this part of town."

"That's what I figured." He poured himself a cup of coffee and sat down. "Now, all I want is to get out of that place. The wallpaper bugs me." He was embarrassed to admit even that much in the cheery surroundings and bright sunlight.

Mrs. Legare gave her husband a reproachful look. "I knew you shouldn't have told Mr. Pike about that wallpaper, Thaddeus."

"Yes, my dear. You were right. It makes a good story, but the

mind sometimes gives life to mere suggestion." Thaddeus turned to T.J. "I'm sorry, Mr. Pike. Give us one more night and we'll prepare one of the other rooms for you. They're all smaller, but the walls have been painted a nice peaceful white. Will that be agreeable?"

"Yeah. I guess so. But just tonight. That's it. Now, what's for breakfast?"

Faustina took a plate of waffles out of the warming oven and smiled down at T.J. "As an apology for your displeasure I'd like to cook a big dinner for you tonight. I'll plan whatever you desire."

"I'd like it even better if I could move into my new room tonight."

"Well, it's been shut up and we'll need to put up curtains and the like."

"Okay, okay. I'll have roast chicken and apple pie, then ... but that room better be ready tomorrow, for sure."

As he walked home from the parking lot that night, T.J. had the same feeling he had had the first night he found the room to rent. Nothing he did could go wrong. Now he had the Legares under his thumb and an easy job. He wondered what would happen next in his new life. It had all started with a hammer. He laughed at that. Gawd! He'd built himself a new life with a hammer.

Thaddeus and Faustina were waiting for him when he came in. He could smell a heavenly dinner cooking in the kitchen, and he noticed that the dining room table was set for three, complete with wine glasses.

The dinner was sumptuous, and T.J. was stuffed with chicken and drowsy from the smooth vintage they kept pouring for him. He pushed away from the table and this time accepted one of Mr. Legare's cigars. Then he tipped back in his chair and blew a smoke ring.

"Tell me, Thaddeus," he said familiarly, "what kind of name is Legare? French?"

"No, Mr. Pike. It's derived from Latin, I believe."

"That so? I don't know what mine is, but a pike is a pike. Yours mean something?"

"The Latin translation is 'to dispatch.'"

"Hey, that's good, Thaddeus. You really sent me tonight with all that good food. We'll have to do this more often."

"Anything to make you comfortable during your stay with us. Isn't that right, Faustina?"

The round head nodded. "Just think of where you might have been."

"Yeah. I wasn't in for long, but long enough."

"You were very fortunate to go free on a technicality, as we discussed the other day, Mr. Pike. And you really would do

it again?" Thaddeus and Faustina waited for his answer.

In his cups from the wine, T.J. didn't bother to hide his enthusiasm for what he'd gotten away with.

"Hell, yes! I might even enjoy it better next time. Of course, I'd plan it all ahead so's I wouldn't get caught. They had me cold the first time . . . but I really lucked out." He puffed proudly on his cigar.

"Well, if you'll excuse us, we'll clear the table now." Faustina rose.

"Have some more wine, Mr. Pike," offered Thaddeus.

T.J. sat over another glass of wine and finished his cigar before he went upstairs. Gawd! He had never eaten so well in his life. So sodden was he with food and drink that the prospect of spending another night in his room didn't alarm him. All he wanted was sleep. He fumbled into his pajamas and was so drowsy that he could hardly make his fingers button the buttons.

Later, in the dark hallway, Thaddeus listened at his door and then moved silently down to the dining room where Faustina was seated. In the center of the table was a candle and a large book with parchment pages. She looked up at her husband inquiringly.

"Shall we begin?"

"Yes." Thaddeus seated himself and began to read aloud: "'And lo, he whom thou hast sent, who repenteth not, shall have the mark of the Devil put upon him, and he shall be consumed by the children of darkness.'"

With a sigh, Faustina carefully closed the book and regarded her husband. "Will none of them have regrets, Thaddeus?"

"How long will the world continue to revolve, dear wife? We've done our work. It's time now to retire."

The next morning Thaddeus knocked on T.J.'s door. "Mr. Pike?" he called loudly. There was no answer.

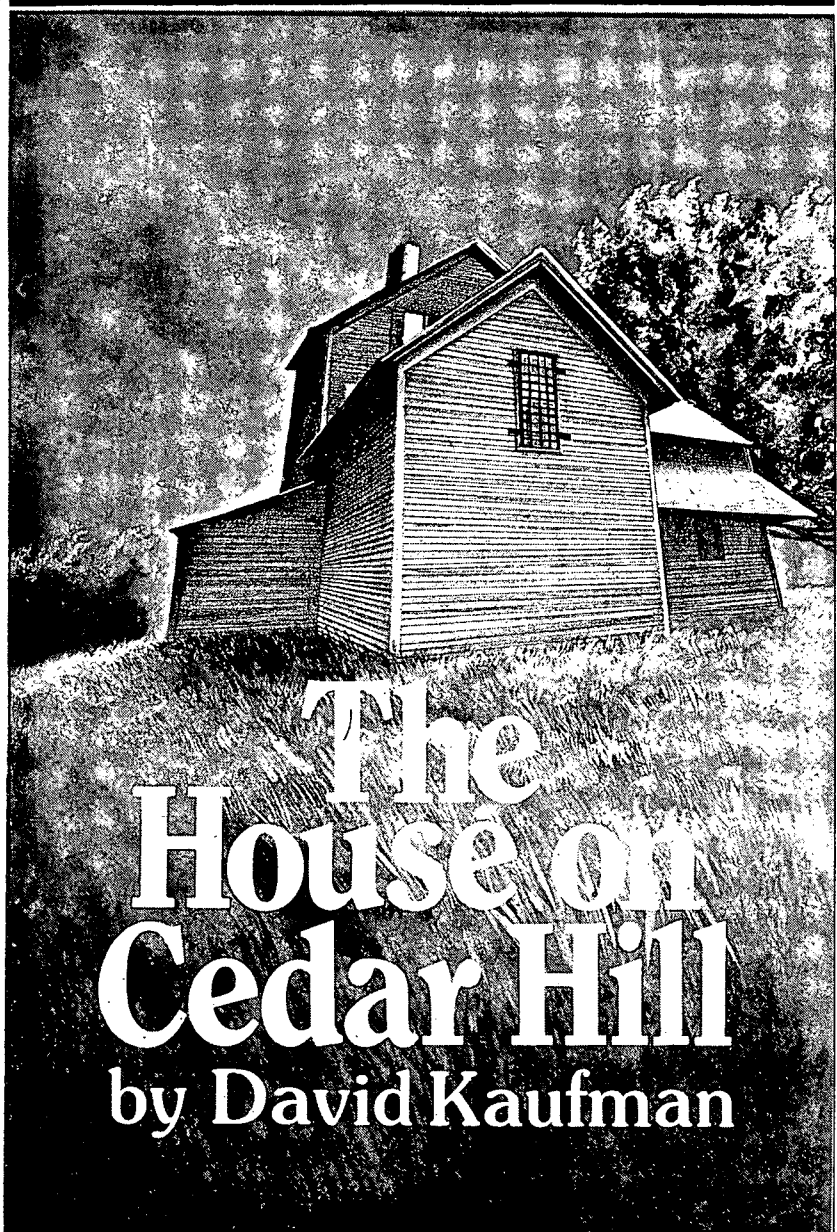
"Here's the key," said Faustina.

They entered the room. The wallpaper was vivid in the morning light; the figures were now rosy-cheeked and brightly colored. The bedclothes were thrown back, and the sheets were flecked with red. Thaddeus stopped and gave an approving nod to the Devil's Children resplendent in their patterns.

"You tend to the linens, Faustina. I'll gather his clothes for the second-hand man."

"Very well, Thaddeus. But first, come look. See?" She laughed indulgently. "They still won't eat the buttons!"

FICTION



The House on Cedar Hill

by David Kaufman

Illustration by Nick Jainschigg

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If you turned left from the main highway about a dozen miles before you came to Garlock's Bend and went up through the thick woods on the gently rising cobblestone road for another two miles, you would come to a clearing and to an impressively long row of tall cedars, a handsome sight indeed against the sky, dark green swaying against dark blue, and from there you would see my grandmother's house high on the hill beyond. My grandmother's house. That house of all houses, scene of my best memories—and of my worst.

I suspect that the cobblestones might be gone now, and if they are, lost to local patios or to highway technology, that is a shame because, at least to me in my youth, they were old and honest and reassuring. And I suspect the cedars are gone, too. Those tall lovely things.

But I am willing to wager that my grandmother's house is still there, high on that green hill. I am not certain of it because I have not gone back there and I do not think I could ever bring myself to go back, but I have the unhappy feeling that the awful house is still there, austere and imposing against the sky.

I used to visit there often for a week or two in the summertime when I was a boy, and once I took great delight in spending the whole of a summer at that house. I cared very much for both my grandparents, but how I loved my grandmother. And how she dominated everyone around her. She cooked for us, she cleaned for us, she laughed and told us all to be good.

"Are you reading your Bible, Howard?" she'd invariably ask at dinner the first evening, each time I arrived to spend a vacation with her. It was a ritual she relished. Very grave she was, and I dared not even smile as I replied.

"Yes, Grammah," I'd answer, nervously kicking my heels on the rung of my chair. My answer always appeared to please her, although I expect she knew I was being at least slightly extravagant. Yet somehow I always managed that "Yes, Grammah."

All the house was well known to us. We were free to roam through the whole of it, all the long hallways and as many of the side rooms as we liked, enjoying, cherishing even, the yellowed wallpaper, the ponderous dark woodwork, and the old bookcases of dusty books with strange and quaint titles.

The house was what used to be called a plank house. It was essentially square, but there was an addition on the back side of it, the north side on the high slope of the hill, away from the road.

The addition was square also, with just one window—on the second floor—and although the builder tried, I am certain, the siding of the addition did not match the original siding of the house. The effect was one of disharmony, and it diminished somewhat the elegance of the building and even the aesthetics of the whole farm.

The addition itself I always looked upon as curious. Even its origin was peculiar. Simply put, there never seemed to be a need for it. The house was quite large—perhaps a dozen rooms—and besides my grandparents there was only Luther, their helper. My father long before had left the farm. And so there seemed no reason for it.

I remember my father once on a visit speaking somewhat sternly to my grandmother about the addition, about its extravagance, when I first began to spend vacations there. It had been put up just before my first summer with them.

"Well," she said, looking very serious. "We finally needed it." And after a long pause, "We really did."

Even as a youngster I thought it strange that so late in their lives they felt the need to build an addition onto the house, but I concluded that it was *their* business, and I was eager and fickle and quickly forgot about it.

Because my grandfather was not a well man, my grandmother kept a hired hand, Luther, who had been with them for years. His health in truth was not much better than my grandfather's, but once I heard my grandmother tell my father that old Luther had been around for so long that she just could not bear to let him go, that in truth she really *needed* him, and so, with each his best effort, the three of them accomplished what none could do alone, and if not excelling, they at least kept the farm in a reasonable state of repair.

On these early visits to the farm I became quite the charge of Luther. I must confess that I loved the fact that he took so keen an interest in me, and my vacations were all the more pleasurable because of him. I really do believe to this day that I cared for him almost as much as I did for my grandfather, who seemed to me then so often distant, and even coldly unresponsive to me. Crotchety old Luther, how I loved him. He taught me about farming, he hobbled along beside me in the woods (my favorite of reasons for going to the farm in the summer), and he saw that I learned all manner of interesting lore about the various trees and animals we encountered.

When I visited my grandparents I was many times the host of children from neighboring farmhouses. Often, as I have related, we roamed about the ponderous old house, playing pirates, hide-and-seek, or some other children's game. So I came to know all of that house quite well.

And towards the end I began to have the strangest feeling about it. I began to feel that somehow the house was much larger on the *outside* than it was on the *inside*. I know how peculiar that must sound, and at first I dismissed the idea as silly, but little by little as I played in the house, especially during that last summer, the idea, which earlier had hardly mattered, took shape and began to grow, and soon I became obsessed with it. I did not speak of it to anyone, but I began to roam the house with a purpose. I counted rooms, I stepped off distances, figured east and west, and soon I was certain. The house *was* larger on the outside than could ever be accounted for by knowing it internally.

Initially, although the idea fascinated me, I thought it only strangely odd, more perplexing than frightening, and in an effort to put it all right, I settled somehow upon the belief that the disparity of size related in some fashion to the addition on the back.

As I said, the thought came without any fear. At the start it was not much more than a puzzle or a game to me. But as my last visit wore on, I began to be compulsive, I began to feel that I had to solve the riddle. I had to find out about the disparity of size. I had, of course, only a boy's power of deduction, but I was so familiar with the house and its layout that I was able, by the last few days of that last vacation, to conclude that indeed it was the addition. Not only that, but also that I had, in all my ramblings, *never been* in the addition of the house. I had for several years felt I had the run of the whole house. Yet there could be no doubt—I had never been in the addition.

Then I was really puzzled. I decided at last to discuss the whole thing with Luther. I discounted my grandmother, for fear she would be distressed and think me somehow prying and ungrateful. My grandfather, I was sorry to note, was usually not altogether coherent. His mind was going, and I found myself strangely afraid of him, even at times repelled by him.

And so the questions fell to Luther. We were in the spring house one afternoon, churning butter. "Luther," I said, "may I ask you a question?"

"Unh?" he grunted, and then he nodded slowly. "Yuh," he said

softly, stolid and tobacco-smelling and somehow very satisfying to be near.

"Were you here the summer they built the addition to the house?"

"Unhuh," he said, looking up carefully. He spoke with a thick Pennsylvania Dutch accent. He nodded and then poured more milk into the churn. "Dat was many year ago now."

Somehow my heart fluttered a bit as I said the words. "Why is it so hidden?" I hesitated. "I mean, it has to be some sort of secret. I've never been in the addition. Have you?"

He stood quite still, staring at me, the saddest look wiping over his face. I could not tell what he was thinking. But finally he shrugged, waved me out of the spring house with a petulant hand, and told me to put it out of my mind.

He seemed a little cool to me in the next few days, and once he declined when I wanted to go walking with him. He gave me no real reason, just said that he didn't want to go.

I must confess that his refusal both hurt and puzzled me because I felt so very close to him. I did not want to displease him. But there it was, and I was too embarrassed to ask him what was wrong between us. I knew it had something to do with the addition, but that was all.

I remember vividly some parts of all this. For example, as I look back I have the distinct impression that by the evening before my last day, because I was so upset by the whole affair with Luther, and because my very simple and innocent question to him had upset *him* so, I went to bed quite soon after supper, sorry that I had hurt him and more afraid than not, of what I could not say. And no matter my grandmother's cajoling me to stay up for my last evening with her, tempting me even with the promise of home-made ice cream.

But I wanted no company. I wanted no ice cream. What I wanted was to be alone, to have the whole ugly thing go away, to be forgiven my transgression, whatever that transgression was. And I felt that if I slept, and slept long enough, perhaps it all would come right by the time I awakened and left for my home the next day.

But I did not sleep. I could not. I lay awake for a very long time that night, an awful feeling of foreboding and dread seeming to slip over my body and cover me like a heavy blanket. An ugly oppression that I could not explain.

I remember that the night was very hot, the heavy damp air somehow adding to my depression. And I remember tying the whole

business to the addition, the somehow awful addition that I cared about only because it had spoiled things between Luther and me. I wished I had never seen it or asked about it. It was the addition that had caused my troubles; it had to be.

And then as I lay there another idea came to me, astounding in its clarity and in its implications; it was a kind of epiphany, somehow making more intense the ominous and dreadful feelings that I could not cast off. It suddenly seemed so obvious. I could not think why it had not occurred to me before.

In all my searches of the house I had paid no attention whatever to the cellar. I cannot believe that even now, but although I had been in the cellar often, I had not gone down there in search of the entrance to the addition. Could it be down there? It had to be that, I concluded. It had to be. I flushed with the sudden excitement of it.

And it all seemed so logical. So logical, and yet somehow so elusive. And then just as suddenly I began to be quite frightened. The cellar seemed a damp, dark place to me, full of hidden nooks and ugly pipes of all sorts and sizes. But that, in truth, was not what made me fearful. It was that the entrance, if down there, was hidden, and that made no sense to me at all. We are, I suspect, inordinately fearful of what we do not understand, and I could not begin to understand something so bizarre as that.

What possible reason, I wondered, could my grandparents, the kindest and most innocent of people, have for hiding a large portion of their house and in secreting the entrance? *That* was what frightened me. I lay there, confused and perplexed.

I had not loved the addition. I had in fact come to hate it. But there could be no reason that I could define why the only door to the place was in the cellar—if, again, it *was* in the cellar. Why would they build it that way? Why?

Over and over these thoughts swirled in my mind.

I may have cried over all this, but I cannot now be certain of anything except my extreme agitation.

Finally, my mind awlirl and my heart thumping, I felt compelled to know, once for always. I *had* to know. If they found me out of bed and were angry, if they hated me even, for some reason unknown to me, I was *determined* to know. It was as if the addition were nagging at me, pulling at me.

This was a serious headful of stuff for a young boy (I think I may have been twelve), but a decision is a decision, and after what

seemed to me to have been hours and hours (I know it had to be well past midnight by that time), I could lie in bed no longer. I just had to try once more to find the elusive entrance. I would go down into the cellar. Indeed, I was *drawn* there. I have, for some time, been convinced of that.

The bed I lay in was quite old. It was full of groanings and squeaks, and once I finally decided, I eased out of it so carefully in that darkness that had anyone seen me, he would have been certain that I was in a still position, so slowly did I move. I wanted no sound. I wanted no one to stop me. And so I had to be stealthy, as distasteful and frightening as that was to me.

I moved to my bedroom door. And again, fear of being caught my motivation, I moved so slowly that I was certain I did not seem to move at all. I inched the door open, eased past it, and closed it ever so carefully behind me. I cannot say how long that took. It seemed to me to be forever. And I remember feeling so tense I could hardly close the door. But, because action is better than inaction, I felt a sense of exhilaration also.

I stood immobile in the dark hallway. In my bedroom a little light from the night sky had come through the window and had enabled me to see. Now in the hallway I was engulfed in darkness. The doors to each room were closed and there was no light at all.

The orange, tear-shaped bulb that usually glowed softly in the long hallway was not on. It was my grandmother's habit to turn it off when she was certain everyone had settled for the night, so I knew that everyone was in bed. And I could only hope that they were asleep and would not hear me.

I thought of going back. I thought desperately of that.

But now, frightened as I was, I was also as if possessed. It was as if someone or something were pulling me forward. I stood for some moments, girding myself for what I had to do. I remembered reading once, probably in some boyhood mystery story, that if one wishes to move down a hallway without being heard, he must carefully walk as close to the wall as he physically can, thus avoiding the creaks of the wooden floorboards—and so I eased forward, my body trembling in fear, my fingers sliding timidly along the wall before me, feeling carefully for bedroom doors and for the top of the stairwell to the kitchen below.

After again what seemed to me to be hours, I stood at the top step. I stood there immobile, my heart pounding. And then, with great resolve, I eased down the stairs so slowly, so slowly. Down

the stairs I moved, terrified at each creak of the old wood. But I felt drawn on. I *know* I was drawn on.

I caught my breath and stopped. I was so frantic, and I had worked myself into such a state with my wild imaginings, that I was suddenly certain that I heard movement above and behind me on the stairs. I was certain that someone was there, certain that someone was following.

I wanted to scream. I wanted to scream and run. But I forced myself to remain quiet. I stood there, trembling and listening. And I could hear nothing but the heavy thumping of my heart, and the silence of the night roaring at me.

Again I waited. Minutes passed. Only that awful quiet.

When I regained control of myself, convinced now that I had imagined the noise and that I was indeed alone, I moved down again, slowly down the steps and across the dark kitchen to the cellar door.

How long all of this took I cannot say with any certainty. It may have been ten minutes or an hour. The dark was complete, and I had gotten myself so agitated that I was a poor judge of anything except my fear, so I cannot say how long that dreadful journey took. But at last I found myself at the cellar door.

I opened the door very slowly, eased past it, and closed it just as slowly. I stood for more long minutes.

My heart was still pounding, and my upper lip was clammy cold. But whatever my emotional state, I was also determined to know the answer. I *had* to know it, and slowly I eased down into the dank smells of the dark cellar.

I think in truth that I was not quite so stealthy going down those old steps as I might have been. Somehow the closed cellar door made me feel less frightened. I still felt the compulsion, but I suppose I reasoned that I would not be heard by anyone sleeping two whole floors above, and although I was still agitated, with each step downwards I became less so. And by the time I reached the bottom and stood in the total darkness, darkness so complete it necessitated the utmost care in movement, I had nevertheless resolved to switch on the cellar light.

I stood at the bottom for just a few more seconds, making certain where it was I wanted to go, and then I inched forward slowly, one foot barely before the other, in what I hoped was the easy arc that would bring me to the pull chain of the cellar light.

And then, oh God! I stopped, petrified with fear! I heard it again!

Although I could not see the cellar door, I was terrified that someone was there, someone was following me. And I heard the door latch shut; I was certain of it then! I could not stop myself. "Who's there?" I cried out. "Who is that? *Grammah!*" I shuddered, all in a panic. "Is that you?"

There was no sound. Nothing. Only that same slamming of my heart.

I thought for certain that I was going to faint, or at least I was going to fall down from fear. But, as before in the stairwell, there was then only utter stillness. I waited for more long minutes, but all the sounds that I heard or thought I heard, however slight, I could account for. There was no human sound, of that I became convinced.

Still I waited.

I began to get my imagination under control again. Why, I reasoned, would someone who followed me not just switch on the light and confront me directly about what I was doing out of bed? Especially at that hour of the morning. It was I, after all, not anyone else, who was being secretive. And so, as I stood there, thus did I once again, with compulsive logic, conclude that no one was above me on the steps.

I moved forward again, very slowly.

As I fumbled around in the darkness looking for the light chain, I bumped into a table, and, reaching out to steady myself, I grasped a small flashlight. There was a piece of luck! There was a piece of luck indeed! It felt strangely cool and good to me, and the familiarity of a little thing like a flashlight in all that darkness gave me no little comfort.

When I tried the thing it lit but dimly, but it was enough. It was enough to calm me, enough to bring me back to the reality of where I was, enough for me to see what there was to see. I was, after all, and once again I realized it, only in my grandmother's cellar. It was a familiar enough sight, and I was reassured. I aimed the flashlight back towards the cellar steps. There was no one there; dim light or no, I could see that. No one. So I had twice been mistaken, twice I had let my imagination get the better of me. Slowly I aimed the dim light around the cellar, wanting to be absolutely certain that I was alone. I could make out no one in the long shadows, nor anything unusual at all.

And I decided quickly not to turn on the cellar bulb. There was no need of it, now that I had the flashlight. And the darkness

tempted me with a sense of its security, a sense that, in the dark at least, I would not be discovered. I flashed the light a third time slowly all around me, to convince myself that there was no one. There was not. I was alone.

Calm now, I came round once again to my reason for being down there, and I began by deciding which wall of the cellar I might start with, where I might find, if indeed there was one, the entrance to the addition and to what was inside.

Actually, I found it more quickly than I thought I would. It was behind the pantry, a large closet that my grandmother had filled with quarts of canned fruit from the farm. The pantry, that gateway to a lifetime of anguish and heartache, stood in the darkest corner of the cellar, sufficiently away from the north wall for a person to move or crawl behind it.

I was in awe of my find.

Even in my wildest imaginings I could find no excuse for a *secret* entrance. At worst I had expected a bolted door on a wall. It could hardly be more secret, however. Drawn by a fear almost sentient, I think I even had hoped I would find no entrance at all, hoped I could find nothing and could go back upstairs. My grandparents, to be honest, seemed, at least to me, to be the most open of people. They had nothing to hide, I was certain. They were such good, clean, decent folks. And very religious. There was no doubt of any of that. But before me was the entrance, and it *was* secreted, hidden behind a large pantry. And no one but my grandparents had built the addition. *There* was something to explain!

And then I remembered suddenly what my grandmother had said to my father some years before. "Well," she had murmured, "we finally needed it." Immediately I was struck by the irony, the bizarreness, the very macabre nature of it all.

There it was before me, nagging at me. Pulling at me, almost literally. Behind the large wooden pantry, a pantry full of innocuous canned fruit. It was nothing more than a rough hole in the stones of the wall, perhaps no larger than three feet by three feet. Incredibly, there was no door, no barrier of any kind, barring access to what lay beyond.

In the darkness and dankness of the cellar I huddled before the opening, with hardly space for my shoulders between the wall and the pantry itself. And as I crouched there, bent over as if I might have been in prayer, straining with the flashlight to see what I could see inside, I became aware of an odor—a dank, putrid odor,

coming from the hole before me. I had the sudden urge to vomit.

But I knew that the time had come, and so I waddled clumsily through the small hole, then went down on my hands and knees and worked my way forward for a few feet. Once I felt I was through I tried to stand, but all I got for my effort was a crack on the head. I was not in a room at all, as I had hoped, but in a sort of tunnel. The flashlight provided almost no light now because it was fading; the batteries were nearly dead. I strained to see just a few inches in front of me. And all around me now the awful rotten odor. I felt for the perimeters of my space as best I could. I *was* in a tunnel, the walls of which felt smooth and cold. Smooth and cold and wet. They were disgusting to the touch. And the tunnel was so confining I began to be claustrophobic.

I switched off the flashlight to conserve what little power there was left in it, and I knew for the first time in my life what it must be like to be blind, to know total darkness. I began to be truly frightened.

But for me there was now no going back. Still on my hands and knees, my body bumping along the slimy wet walls of the tunnel, revolted by the smell I can only describe as like that of rotten eggs, I inched forward slowly, as best I could in my agitated state.

Almost immediately I sensed that I was moving not on the level but downhill, down a grade, as I worked my way forward. The tunnel seemed to me to grow somehow smaller, more confining, and the way more difficult. The stench was almost overpowering now. Rotten eggs and sulphur.

And soon I was fairly certain that I was not headed for the addition. Or that I had missed *another* entrance to it. Indeed, I already had crawled along many times the length of the house. I was going down—deeper and deeper into the hillside. The rancid air was becoming warmer also, warmer and more putrid.

I cannot now say what it was that compelled me to move on, why I did not turn and flee as best I might out of that long black hideous tunnel, back to the pantry and the familiar darkness of my grandmother's cellar. *Something* was pulling me on, deeper and deeper, but I was afraid to think what it was. I wish I had gone back at that last moment. I wish I had been able to pull away and run. But I could not.

I wish all of that desperately, but I did not retreat. And it is now too late.

I thought I heard noises in the tunnel behind me again, but the

flashlight was too weak to reveal anything or anyone. It was of no use at all now. I threw it to the ground in disgust. And thus I was doomed to darkness. I crawled on and down.

And still I heard the noise behind me. "Who's there?" I whispered. The loudness of my voice surprised me in that awful gulf of silence. I had barely spoken, but my voice seemed to roar.

There was no answer.

What happened next happened so quickly that I can only hope I rehearse all of it correctly.

I began crawling forward in earnest now, more rapidly, frantically almost. I am not certain, but I should guess I had been drawn on into the tunnel some fifty or perhaps a hundred yards. It was as if I had no control over my body, as if something was actually pulling me, faster and faster, into that black and eldritch nothingness, into the fetid air, into what I did not know, nor could I ever have guessed. And then the growing heat and the awful odor suddenly got so much worse that, although I wanted to go on, even felt *compelled* to do so, I was forced to stop, still on hands and knees, and I could crawl no farther. I knelt there, hunched over, panting, exhausted, searing pains slashing at my arms and legs like knives. There was an awful rushing sound in my head. I was certain that I could not last long, hunched over like that, one large mass of fear and anguish. I began sobbing uncontrollably. But I just could not move. I was immobile, frightened beyond movement.

I crouched there, urged forward but unable to move, unable to think. And then, from down the tunnel, far down the tunnel, *in front of me*, I barely caught the sound of a heavy, labored breathing, not human, not possibly human at all, but long and low and incredibly raspy. And the sound grew. And then the noise of movement, heavy movement, slow and casual, coming towards me from below. It was a thrashing, heaving sound, and the air of the tunnel, that awful fetid air, was coming at me as if the body or thing or whatever it was filled the tunnel and thrust the hot, stinking air towards me as a piston might.

And the sounds grew louder and louder. The crashing sounds of a heavy body smashing against the sides of the tunnel, followed by the low, inhuman keening of timeless doom and anguish.

It seemed to stop suddenly, this thing, as if it had just confronted me, as if it were surprised, or suspicious, or puzzled. I seemed to sense it there—I sensed something at least, a mass blacker than black just in front of me.

But in truth I could not see or breathe or think or even scream. I was reduced to a mass of terror.

And the last thing I remember was its inhuman wail of rage, and at the same instant someone from behind me thrusting me violently to the floor of the tunnel and stumbling desperately over me to get between me and the thing, whatever it was. Then another outraged, horrid wail, and then a human scream of terror. And the sounds of rending flesh.

And then I lost it all.

I shall never forget those sounds. Never. I wish I might before I die, but I cannot forget. I cannot forget.

Those are the essentials of my story. I have held the whole of it inside for all of my life. No one believed me then. My parents, even my own parents, when they heard, did not believe me. They consoled me, they humored me for a time while I was still abed, but in the end, they did not believe me. I think—I think that I was perhaps an embarrassment to them. I think it was that. So in short order I stopped rehearsing my tale. I felt they wished it so, wished for my silence. Especially my father. How I ached for his understanding. And he never again seemed to be there for me.

And the questions remain. So many questions. Questions that I have asked myself in anguish a thousand times.

How, for example, did I get from the blackness of that awful tunnel to my home, where I woke at the last? And *who* was it got me out of that tunnel itself? The final thing I remembered was that hideous agonized scream of pain. And the next I knew I was looking up at the concerned face of my father. Memory may have softened, but I do believe he had the saddest, most helpless look I have ever seen on a man's face. And to this day I wonder if, in the conversations that followed, he dared tell me all of what was in his mind.

What did *he* know? What was *he* not telling?

I remember that in our discourses I learned that some days had passed. What, I wonder now, as I have wondered most of my life, what happened to me in those few days? Especially those first hours after I fainted away?

My father asked me, in the early moments when I woke at home, what I remembered, and I could tell him nothing. Nothing, at least, that he seemed to find acceptable to hear. When, in fact, I began to describe what I did know, what I remembered—the fetid air, the awful stench, the horrid keening of whatever unearthly thing was

in front of me, and especially that scream of agony—my father did not seem to wish to hear. He became very vague and distant, and said that what I needed was rest. What I needed was rest, he said, and all would come round right.

When I told him that what started the whole thing was that I had only wished to find the door to the addition of my grandmother's house, that I, in fact, felt compelled to—that it seemed as time went on that I couldn't stop myself, he mumbled something about not being foolish. He insisted that we both had been in there dozens of times, that my grandmother entertained there often, and when he got that look again, I knew that I was to stop talking.

I knew what that look meant.

I could not understand why he did not wish to refer to the addition because even in my confused state it was clear to me that *it*, or the entrance to it, was the cause of all the difficulty. And, contrary to what my father had said, we indeed had not ever been in the addition. Rather, I was *under* it: I *was*, in the tunnel, and *someone had gotten me out and saved me!* My father had said that not only were my hands and knees torn and bloody—from crawling, he supposed—but my side also, as if someone had dragged me quite far and quite abruptly. But he would speak about none of it. Not a word.

And then I learned the reason for his reticence. One afternoon he came to me and sat on the edge of my bed. He looked inexpressibly sad, and after some moments quietly said, "Howard, it's time for you to know, I think. You are well enough, now. I think you are." He hesitated for some moments, looking down at the sheets. "Your grandfather is dead."

So! That was it! It was my *grandfather* who died, who threw me to the ground and was torn asunder. He had given his life to save me. I had assumed it was Luther, although I had never had the courage to ask because of my father's vagueness and surly attitude.

And I felt crushed by the knowledge. Guilty and crushed for the awful slight I had shown my grandfather—who had obviously loved me and cared for me far more than I had ever loved him. How I must have hurt him when, on those vacations, I avoided him in favor of Luther.

"What?" I managed. "How?"

"He died in his sleep that same night," my father said. "His old heart gave out, Howard."

I started to say something, to protest that I *knew* how he had

died, and it was not by any means a heart attack. Could they not tell that? But he interrupted, as if he somehow wanted to get something said before I spoke. "I did not see him. Your grandmother had him taken away immediately to be cremated. 'It was what he wanted,' she said. She said that they had discussed it many times before."

I was speechless. Confused and speechless. Yet whatever my agitated state, I was reasonable enough to know that my grandfather had died a far different and more hideous death than by a heart attack. I was certain of it.

But suddenly, as I looked at my father, and as I thought of some of the things he had said, how he had tried to steer our conversations away from my version of what had happened, how distant he was with me when I came home, I somehow did not wish to try to share any of that with him. I had grown afraid of him. I suddenly did not wish to share my experiences any longer with anyone.

I knew then that it was my lot to be forever alone.

And so. The addition.

What was the addition? A question to be asked. I have never been in it, I do swear that, and must conclude I do not know where the entrance is. Perhaps *farther along* in the tunnel.

That is what frightens me now. Perhaps I was mistaken about how far forward I had crawled in all that heat and blackness, and I had *not yet reached* the entrance upwards.

My grandfather died in my place, that I do know. It was not Luther, as I had concluded in those first few days of consciousness at home. My grandfather had followed me. Why he had, why he did not stop me, what things he might have known—I shall never have the answer to any of those questions.

It was Luther and my grandmother, then, who pulled me from the tunnel. It had to have been them. And to do that they must have known all about it. They must have known about the thing, too. And why and how they knew of my presence there that night is something I'd rather not think about. They somehow disposed of my grandfather's body, if there *was* any body to dispose of. Perhaps, and can I really be thinking this, they had come down to dispose of *my* body.

I never saw either of them again. Several times my father told me of my grandmother's great concern for me, for my welfare, and he said that she hoped desperately I'd visit again one day, but always I became so agitated that he soon stopped suggesting it. It

must have hurt him very much because, after all, she was his mother. But always I have felt that perhaps there were *other*, more cogent, reasons for his inclinations. In time we never spoke of her or the farm. And, God forgive me, I never quite felt the same about or quite trusted my father again. I was afraid to trust him. He knew *something*. I know he knew *something*.

And so there it is.

As I look back, I must conclude that I was never the same person after that horrid incident. I became a recluse, what some would call a hopeless eccentric. I had, in time, all my father's money, and so it was not necessary for me ever to be employed. I traveled to strange places, I read extensively, I wondered.

But I never found any answers.

In time I became the frightened, distorted old man I am now. Waiting.

Did they want me that night? Did they in fact *do* something to me that changed me forever? Why have I always, in all the years that followed, felt myself the outsider, felt *different* from all others I have come in contact with?

I swear that I hear strange sounds, see things when I know nothing is there.

But in the end I can deal with all that. Soon, in my ultimate sadness, in the pathetic destiny that comes to each of us, I will be free of the consummate agony which has been mine.

But there is something other that haunts me now, that terrifies me for the very world. And about which I am helpless, helpless, helpless, and can do nothing.

Years have passed—years of fear, of depression, of final despair. My father is dead, and my grandmother and Luther also are long gone from the earth. But there *was* a thing. An evil, foul-smelling, loathsome, otherworld thing, come from someplace beyond someplace.

And there still remains the question of questions—*where is it? Where is the thing now?*

THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH



Arthur Tress

Obviously, a well-balanced individual. . . . We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017.

The winning entry for the June Mysterious Photograph will be found on page 155.

The Mahogany Wardrobe

by John H. Dirckx



Illustration by Joe Jereda

I cannot say what it was about the girl's appearance, when she came to my door that foggy night in April, that made me want to take her in even though the house was already full. Maybe it was her unmistakable air of innocence and simplicity. Or it may have been the fact that just then all the neighborhood dogs began to howl. Whatever the reason, I took Alice Weldon in that night, put her wrap and her single piece of luggage in the hall, and told Doris to make up the bed in the studio.

At the outset I must explain that I am a widow of more than ample means with a large house and no children. Without quite intending to do so, I had drifted into the business of boarding and letting rooms to single girls, most of them just arrived in Bradford to make their way in the wide world. We were a simple household, consisting, besides myself, of Jessie Frazer, the cook, whose training as a nurse had sometimes to be put to use; Doris Brewer, the maid; my nephew Arthur, who had lost his parents and served as our man of all work; about six girls in more or less temporary residence; and a cat of obscure antecedents named Etcetera.

The room that we had always called the studio—the original owner of the house was a profes-

sional portrait painter—was on the first floor at the front, and was therefore not very suitable as a sleeping apartment because of the street noises. But it was large and comfortable all the same, with tall arched windows to admit the light on three sides, and a fireplace to supplement the furnace in the dead of winter. Among the odd articles of furniture stored there, a bed stood in one corner for the sake of the occasional supernumerary guest. It was in the studio that we placed Alice.

Though she will not remain long on our stage, I must just give a brief sketch of her, since she was the first victim of that reign of terror that drew so much public attention to our formerly placid neighborhood and nearly put my establishment out of business. Alice Weldon had stepped off the bus from Mooreton half an hour before presenting herself on my doorstep and, like so many of my girls, she had been directed to me by a previous tenant. Perhaps, after all, it was that which decided me to take her in.

She was a mere wisp of a girl, barely nineteen, with dark hair and eyes and a sober, self-contained manner. She assured us that she had already had her supper, but gratefully accepted Cook Jessie Frazer's offer of a refreshing cup of tea. All of the

girls were home that night, I remember, and they welcomed the newcomer warmly to the oversized dining room that, fitted up with a radio and a record player and a couple of sofas, served as our informal sitting room—a haven in which to relax when the day's toil was done.

Although inclined to be a little reserved at first, Alice soon thawed in the glow of the girls' cordiality and manifest goodwill. She had come to town, she said, with recommendations from her clergyman and the principal of her high school, and she hoped to find a job at the woolen mill which is Bradford's chief industry, and which Bradfordites never call by any other name than "the blanket works."

"You must let me take you to the office," said Jan Talbot, looking up from the jigsaw puzzle with which she had been monopolizing the sideboard for the better part of a week. "I've been in the mail room at the blanket works for six months. We could use another girl, I think—maybe they'll let you work with me."

"That would be nice," remarked Alice shyly.

"If you take my advice," said Jessie Frazer, "you won't tell a soul at the blanket works that you know Jan Talbot. What

they don't know, they can't hold against you."

Jan put out her tongue at Jessie and went back to her puzzle.

Our resident cook was a stout, high-spirited girl in her early thirties with a ready smile and a word for everyone—too many words, in fact, for some people's tastes, for now and then her goodnatured chaffing aroused a bit of ill feeling. But she was as generous in deed as in words. When Alice was getting settled down in the studio for the night, it was Jessie who lent her a heavy blue flannel nightgown to keep out the chill that had crept in, along with traces of fog, while Doris was airing the room.

I was up next morning before dawn, as usual, to see that the others were stirring and doing betimes. Mornings were always somewhat hectic and confused at our house, with the girls dashing about to get ready in time for work, begging and borrowing clean shirt-waists, searching for shoes imprudently left in the most unlikely places, and breakfasting on a swallow of coffee and a bite of toast, when their haste permitted them to breakfast at all. Above the hubbub rang Jessie's clear, sharp accents, extolling the virtues of her sausage and waffles, goading the slug-

gards into wakefulness, and soothing short tempers with her unfailing good cheer.

I had gone first into Polly Gerard's room that morning. Polly was just recovering from a lengthy illness, and I had got into the habit of seeing to her needs in the early morning while Jessie was busy in the kitchen. Polly thought she might try a soft-boiled egg and some toast.

I was surprised not to find Alice Weldon among those huddled round the kitchen table in various stages of undress. She had planned to arise early, I knew, so that Jan could introduce her at the blanket works before reporting for duty herself. I sent Doris to wake her and told Jessie about the egg and toast for our invalid.

In less than a minute Doris was back to report that Alice wasn't in her bed—in fact, didn't seem to be anywhere in the house. "But she can't have gone out, Mrs. Byers," said Doris, "because her wrap is still hanging there in the wardrobe."

Something cold clutched at my heart when I heard those words. On first coming into the kitchen I had noticed, by the gray light of dawn, something lying on the grass between the garage and the back fence. I had thought it must be a scrap of wrapping paper blown into the yard by the wind. Now I

rushed to the window for another look and then, without pausing to put on my coat or to speak a word to anyone, I threw open the kitchen door and ran down the steps into the yard.

Alice Weldon was lying all in a heap against the fence, barefoot and in her nightgown, or rather in Jessie's nightgown. A hideous wound disfigured her throat, and there was blood everywhere. Her face wore the pallor of death. My head swam, and I believe I was on the point of tumbling down in a faint beside her when Jessie brushed past me and bent over the still form.

With brisk efficiency she felt the limp wrist for a pulse and brushed the hair back from the girl's brow for a look at her eyes. "She's just barely breathing, Mrs. Byers," she said. "Her pulse is like a thread, coming and going. One of us must call for Dr. Melton at once."

"I'll call," said I, glad to escape that appalling scene.

"And do bring a blanket," Jessie called after me.

Dr. Melton lived in our street, though his office was several blocks away in what our town council rather grandly calls the commercial district. He had often been to our house—twice in the past week, in fact, to see Polly.

I sent Doris out to Jessie

with a blanket and hurried to the telephone in the front hall. My hands shook as I dialed the familiar number. From the kitchen came the sound of at least two young women having hysterics.

The doctor was just on the point of leaving on his rounds. He advised me to call for an ambulance and said he would be along in half a minute. It could not have been much more than that before I caught sight of his yellow roadster drawn up in the alley behind the garage and went out to report that the ambulance was on its way.

"It can't come too soon," he said grimly, kneeling in the dewy grass beside Alice. "She's in deep shock." With deft fingers he prepared to give her a hypodermic injection. Two of the girls had come out to ask if they could help, and he sent one of them along the alley to his house to fetch more supplies.

"This is a bad business, Mrs. Byers," said the doctor, when he had put away his syringe and adjusted the dressing at Alice's throat. "Not one of your regular girls, is she?"

"She only came last night."

"What on earth can she have been doing out here in her nightgown? She must have been lying here for hours. She's chilled to the bone and soaked with dew."

"Oughtn't we to move her indoors?"

"No, better not. The ambulance will be here in a few moments and then we'd only have to move her again."

"Will she—"

"She's far gone." His eyes hardened and fixed on some distant point. "This is the work of a maniac," he said. "You didn't find any weapon?"

"Weapon? Why, no—" I suppose that until that moment I hadn't dared to face the fact that some fiend in human guise had done this to Alice. A young woman does not, I now told myself, get her throat cut accidentally in the back yard of a rooming house at three in the morning. Of course there was no weapon in sight. He would have taken that away with him. . . .

As the eerie wail of the approaching ambulance broke in on my reverie, Dr. Melton knelt beside Alice again, gently shouldering aside the vigilant Jessie. He felt for a pulse and then bent lower to use his stethoscope. Very slowly he drew erect.

"There's no occasion for haste now," he said, as if to himself. "The poor child is dead."

Even before the ambulance, its siren stilled, took Alice away to the mortuary, two policemen, very square of chin and

stern of eye, arrived. One of them interviewed each of us in turn, asking many pointed questions and writing down our answers in a notebook. The other ransacked the house and went up and down the alley peering into trash cans and probing among dead weeds. He lingered long in the kitchen, examining Jessie's stock of knives with a professional eye.

I handed over the dead girl's small suitcase to the officer who asked the questions, but he made me open it and go through the contents with him. There was precious little to go through. Some plain but decent clothes, a book or two, a few toilet articles, and a pocket purse with twenty-seven dollars and a few cents. That was the lot.

Some other articles of clothing hung in the wardrobe next to the bed. On a table we found a leather case containing Alice's letters of recommendation and a few private papers, one of them bearing her home address in Mooreton.

"I gathered from some things she said last night that she was an orphan," I told the policeman, "but I don't really know that. I believe she was raised by an aunt and uncle."

"They'd be the Pattersons mentioned in those papers."

"I'm sorry I can't be of more help, officer, but I'd barely met

the poor girl when she was—"

"That's all right, ma'am," said the policeman stolidly, shutting his notebook and putting it away. "This is just preliminary. A detective from the Homicide Bureau will be around to see you before long."

Was it my imagination, or did his tone imply that the homicide detective would succeed in extracting any information that I had deliberately withheld from him?

The other policeman, the searching one, had poked around our empty garage (we kept no automobile), but to my relief he seemed not to have noticed that there were living quarters above it. Perhaps I should have explained before that my nephew Arthur had made his home there since the preceding autumn. He took his evening meals with us and was often in the house to do odd jobs, but he slept above the garage, and left very early to catch the first bus to the technical college, where he was studying radio engineering.

Arthur's mother, my sister Louise, had died while Arthur was away in military service, and her husband had passed away shortly after. My sister hadn't made a very good marriage, and when Arthur was demobilized after the European armistice he found himself not only without parents but al-

most without funds. It seemed an act of common decency rather than of charity to install him in my vacant chauffeur's quarters and help him start a life for himself.

Arthur had always been a quiet boy, but since his war experience, of which he seldom spoke, he seemed to have grown more somber and introspective than ever. I don't mean that he was queer exactly, just different. Sensitive, and not easy to talk to. Only Jessie seemed able to get round his shyness and reserve and draw him out a little.

As soon as the police had left, I shooed all of the girls except Polly off to work. They were late, of course, and most were so upset that they might as well have stayed home for all the good they were going to do their employers. Then I went to Arthur's rooms and let myself in with my key.

If you had asked me then what I expected to find, I hardly know what I would have answered. I am sure that I was afraid to ask myself.

Arthur's small apartment was tidy with a masculine sort of tidiness, Spartan rather than cosy. Along the wall next to the bed ran a workbench with a rack of tools and a few electrical appliances. Arthur had always been mechanically inclined. In

the last letter I ever received from my sister, she reported with pride his acceptance to army radio school. That was before he was sent overseas.

It would hardly be correct to say that I searched Arthur's rooms. I may have opened a drawer or two, but not to disturb, much less rummage through, their contents. I left the small, battered secretary alone, though the key was in the leaf.

On a shelf in the closet I saw a dull gleam of metal and knew what I had come to find. I lifted down, and carried to the window, a German bayonet—Arthur always called it "Prussian"—which looked as long as a fencepost and as sharp as a razor. Arthur had brought this grisly trophy into the house once to cut some leather, and another time to pry off the lid of a jar. Had it borne those dark stains the last time I saw it? I wrapped the bayonet in a piece of newspaper and took it away with me.

In the studio stood an old mahogany wardrobe, square and massive, which had come with the house. Some of Alice's clothes still hung in it, but otherwise it was empty except for a secret compartment of which no one knew but me. Under the false floor of the wardrobe there was a cavity as big as an orange

crate, which could be opened by simultaneously pressing two catches concealed in the molding at the base. How my late husband came to discover this I don't know—probably by the exercise of that same ingenuity that raised him to the rank of major in Army Intelligence. In any event, he had used the secret compartment as a repository for private documents and, during one dark period, for large sums of money that he dared not entrust to a bank.

Feeling very much like a malefactor, I stole into the studio, opened the compartment at the bottom of the wardrobe, and laid the Prussian bayonet inside it atop a pile of birth certificates, faded photographs, bundled letters, and boxes of miscellaneous mementos. Having completed this task without the knowledge of any of the others then in the house—Polly, the maid Doris, and Jessie—I breathed more freely, and went about my daily routine with a less heavy heart.

Some reporters came around noon, but Doris repelled them with brisk indignation.

None of us made any pretense of eating lunch that day. I was with Polly, trying to coax her to take a little more of the soup for which I myself had no appetite, when Doris announced that a detective was

waiting to see me. I asked her to put him in the front parlor, a small, square room off the hall where I allowed the girls to entertain gentlemen callers.

I found the detective sitting in a brown study with his hat on his knee. He rose promptly as I entered and introduced himself as Inspector Franklin.

He was a pleasant-faced man, not very tall, with a quiet but authoritative manner. "Mother was a Franklin," I said, inviting him to resume his seat and taking one opposite him. "I'm afraid that most of the girls have gone to work."

"That's all right, Mrs. Byers. You are the one I particularly wanted to see. It was you who found the murdered girl, I believe."

"Yes. Only of course she wasn't dead when I found her."

"Did she say anything—anything at all?"

"No, she was quite unconscious. 'Comatose' was the word that Dr. Melton used."

He nodded. "I've talked with the doctor. But you saw her first. Tell me how her condition impressed you."

"I was—shocked. I thought she was dead. She never moved, and her skin was as pale as ivory."

"I suppose you've no idea how she came to be outdoors in her nightgown?"

"None whatever. That's as much of a mystery as how she came to be killed."

"Those two mysteries, I fancy, are one," he remarked. "May I smoke?"

I consented politely, fearing that he would proceed to embue the premises with the odor of some rank cigar or sputtering pipe. I was relieved when it was only a cigarette. I noticed with amusement that he kept his matches in his hat.

"I wonder if it's occurred to you," he said, "that Alice Weldon must have gone outside willingly to meet her assailant, unless he was already in the house?"

I shuddered. "Couldn't she have been walking in her sleep?"

"She could, of course," he conceded with an indulgent smile. "But if we postulate that, we must also postulate that she walked barefoot out into the chilly night and chanced to meet a homicidal maniac in the back yard."

"But, surely," I said, "if she went outdoors willingly—I mean, awake—she would be all the more unlikely to go without her shoes or her wrap?"

"But supposing that her going out was a matter of great urgency?"

Something lay hidden in his words that I could not fathom. "I can hardly imagine—"

"Suppose, for example, that she heard, or thought she heard, a child outside crying for help. Would she stop to put on her shoes before rushing out? Would you?"

"No, I don't imagine that I should. But no one else heard anything during the night."

"I understand that the murdered girl slept on the ground floor, whereas the other sleeping apartments are all upstairs."

"Yes; except Polly's."

He unfolded a sheet of paper covered with small, neat writing and smoothed it out on his knee. "That would be Miss Gerard."

"Yes. She's just come out of the hospital with scarlet fever—without it, I suppose I mean. The doctor said she wasn't to use the stairs during her convalescence, so we moved her, bed and all, into what used to be the serving pantry. But it would take an earthquake to rouse her during the night because she gets a bromide at bedtime."

He had a curious gesture, a trick of running the tip of his little finger round the rim of his ear from the top down to the lobe. Later on, I was to know that gesture well. Whether it betokened concentration or bafflement, I could not then be sure. "Turn it around," he said.

"Suppose the girl ran outside to get away from something."

"Something in the house?"

"Or someone."

"You said before that the murderer could have been in the house. Surely you don't mean—"

"She might have admitted him herself."

"Really, inspector. A young woman doesn't admit a stranger to her rooming house in the dead of night."

"Oh, I didn't say it was a stranger. A murderer isn't often a total stranger to his victim. Just how much do you know about this girl?"

"Very little, I'm afraid. I went through her things with the policeman this morning—"

"I've been through them, too," he said. "I mean, did she say anything about her personal affairs? Any mention of an engagement broken off, or of any sort of trouble at home that might have caused her to leave?"

"Oh, no, nothing like that. She spoke of her aunt and uncle, affectionately I thought, and of her plan to apply for a job at the blanket works. She paid a week's rent in advance."

"She didn't seem restless or frightened?"

"Not in the least. Just shy. Of course the police have been in touch with her family?"

"The aunt and uncle, yes. Her

parents are deceased. The Pattersons are arriving this evening. They'll take the body back to Mooreton for burial."

"Do you really suppose she might have let someone into the house during the night—someone who had followed her from home?"

He did not reply at once. "Let's say, Mrs. Byers, that that's the most likely explanation. This morning you were perfectly certain that the front and back doors were securely locked at bedtime last night, and that they remained so until you went out to Alice Weldon in the back yard this morning. Has anything occurred to you since to shake that conviction?" He was so soft-spoken that at times his words actually became inaudible, only the movement of his lips showing what he meant to say.

"No, nothing. And the police officer and I went round the whole house to examine all of the window fastenings on this floor and in the basement."

He nodded. "Nothing open, and no sign of an entry having been forced."

"If the murderer was inside the house," I asked, choosing my words carefully, "why would he take Alice outside to—do what he did to her? There wasn't a trace of blood in the studio—that is, in Alice's room—or

anywhere else in the house."

Inspector Franklin stood up and went to the window. It commanded a view of the side yard, but not that part of it where Alice had died. "We come back again to the question of the relationship between murderer and victim. Who has a key to this house besides yourself?"

"Why, everyone. All of the girls have keys, and Doris and Jessie. And, of course, Arthur."

He returned to his seat and consulted his notes. "Who," he asked, "is Arthur?"

"Arthur Sims, my nephew." I tried to make my tone sound natural. "He lives above the garage."

His hand went up at once to his ear. "He wasn't here this morning, was he?"

"No, he'd already gone out. He's studying radio engineering at the technical college, and he has to catch an early bus."

"Doesn't he come into the house for breakfast?"

"No, he gets his breakfast at a lunch counter at the college. He comes in to stoke the furnace on cold mornings, but we haven't needed the furnace for the past three days."

"How long has your nephew made his home here with you?"

"About six months." I told him as much of Arthur's history as seemed pertinent.

"I'd like to interview your

nephew as soon as possible," he said. "What time does he usually come home?"

"At half past four, or a little later."

He considered. "I hadn't planned to trespass on your hospitality for so long as that," he remarked. An inspector in the Homicide Bureau talking of trespassing on one's hospitality! I was beginning to like him. "I'll probably stop back this evening. Does your nephew lead an active social life?"

"If you mean will he likely be out for the evening, the answer is no. Arthur is a quiet, studious boy, very keen on doing well at college. He practically exists on charity here, and it's obvious that he yearns for independence. I expect he'll break away as soon as he can."

"No particular lady friends?"

"None that I know of."

"An attachment to one of the girls in the house, perhaps?"

"Oh, no. I don't think so."

He fell silent for a time and appeared to be studying the pattern of the wallpaper with intense concentration. At length he referred to his notes. "May I ask you to give me a thumbnail sketch of each of the girls presently living here? How long they've been with you, any traits of character that strike you as outstanding..." His voice trailed off into silence again.

"Well, I've mentioned Polly already. She's a bright, vivacious girl when she's well, but just now she's pretty low. She's lived here for about a year, and until her illness she was employed in the design department at the blanket works. Iris Crane and Mary Dockerty are cousins from Shelbyville who room together. They're both teachers at the elementary school three blocks away on Market Street. They've been with me since last August, and sometimes I think they plan to stay for the rest of their days."

"Not the marrying kind, then?" suggested the inspector shrewdly, ticking off the names on his list with a pencil.

"Not like Beverly Lamb," I said with a smile. "Beverly is attending art school, but I'd say the odds are against her finishing before the wedding bells ring."

"Lots of gentlemen callers?"

"Telephone callers, mostly. She doesn't get much company here. You see, Beverly comes from a wealthy family in Avondale. She's been staying with me since January because I knew her mother at school, but the decor here and the neighborhood don't suit her idea of proper surroundings for a young lady of culture and—prospects. So she contrives to meet her friends in town."

"Contrives?" He caught at the word. "To me that suggests something furtive—devious."

"Then I've misled you. Beverly is a good girl at heart, just spoiled. She shares a room with Gussy Warren; who has nothing, and whom she contrives—that word again!—to keep well supplied with nearly new stockings and other nice things. Gussy works at the German bakery on State Street. She's supporting an aged mother and a younger brother who live out in Hartley beyond the end of the streetcar line. She spends her Sundays with them. She came to me just before Christmas."

"And Janet Talbot?" he prompted, almost in a whisper.

"Jan has lived here for about six months. She's a steady, sensible girl. She sorts mail orders at the blanket works, but I shouldn't be surprised if one day she were running the company. The other two members of the household besides myself are fixtures. Doris Brewer has been with me as a maid for seven years—since before my husband's death. Her father is a Baptist minister in Mississippi, and he is the only male in creation for whom she has a good word. Jessie Frazer came to stay with me four years ago, when I had just two other girls. She's a practical nurse and had

taken a job at the hospital. Then came the first wave of wounded soldiers when the military hospitals began to overflow, and it was just too much for her. I lost my cook at about that time, and Jessie stayed on in her place."

"What do you make of the fact that Alice Weldon was wearing a nightgown of Jessica Frazer's when she was murdered?" asked the inspector.

"Why, nothing at all. The room where we put Alice to bed was chilly because we'd opened the windows to air it out. It seemed terribly late to call Arthur in to lay a fire in the studio, so Jessie lent Alice a heavy flannel gown for the night."

"You think it unlikely that someone mistook Alice for your cook?"

"Yes, I do. Jessie would make two of Alice. And no one but the members of the household would know that Jessie sometimes wore a dark blue flannel nightgown."

"I realize that," he said mildly.

"But you can't think that one of us—"

"What about girls who have left you in the past few months? Might any of them have had a feud with Jessie Frazer? Did any of them perhaps go away 'under a cloud,' as the saying is?"

"No, certainly not. I assure

you, Inspector Franklin, that no one who has lived under this roof in my time is capable of doing what someone did last night to Alice Weldon."

His little finger sought the rim of his ear. "Your nephew, you say, lives above the garage—"

"Inspector!" My voice grew shrill in spite of, or perhaps because of, my determination to remain calm. "Did you think I was playing with my words? Arthur hasn't killed anyone—"

"Have you ever asked him that? He was in France, you said—"

"As a radio operator."

"As a soldier, Mrs. Byers. A soldier's business is to kill. His own survival may depend on it."

"But what has that to do with Alice Weldon?" I was smoldering with indignation and he knew it.

"I will tell you. Alice Weldon was killed from behind by a right-handed person who used a large, heavy knife and held her head against his chest, covering her mouth with his left hand. She may have bitten that left hand, by the way—"

"Well?" I demanded, still not seeing the connection with Arthur.

"Soldiers are taught to kill in exactly that way."

"Surely not with a knife! Even

in the Middle Ages they could do better than that."

"Better?" he asked, with a wistful smile that was almost a reproof. "Yes, bombs and shells and machine guns are better, I suppose, if you don't like to look your enemy in the face—to hear his screams of fear and pain, and find his blood on your hands afterwards—"

I must have turned pale at that, for he broke off and picked up his hat from the floor. "I'm sorry if I've upset you," he said. "I wonder if I might see the room where Alice Weldon slept last night?"

Without a word I led him to the studio.

He examined the windows and the fireplace, and spent some time studying the bed, which the police had ordered us to leave unmade. He knelt on the floor and peered under the bed with the aid of a pocket flash. When he had looked over Alice's few poor garments hanging in the wardrobe, he shut its heavy door and put his back to it, letting his eyes roam searchingly round the room, and now and then fixing me with a glance that seemed to probe my deepest thoughts—thoughts just then straying to Arthur's bayonet, which lay hidden within his reach.

I often think of that scene, Inspector Franklin leaning

against the mahogany wardrobe, I peevishly refusing to meet his gaze, and neither of us suspecting that the solution to the mystery of Alice's death was there in the room with us.

The inspector was preparing, I think, to leave when I heard Arthur's voice in the hall. As we came out of the studio, we found him at the foot of the back stairs, still in his coat and hat, getting the story of Alice Weldon's murder from Jessie. He appeared pale and shaken. I introduced him to the inspector.

"I heard it on the radio at lunch," said Arthur. "I thought there must be a mistake because I'd never heard of the girl. But they gave your name, Aunt Vi, and the address. I tried to telephone several times, but the line was always busy."

"That was Doris's doing," I said. "She left the telephone off the hook because reporters kept calling."

"You didn't see or hear anything unusual last night or this morning, then, Mr. Sims?" asked the inspector.

"Not a thing. I left before seven. It was still dark then."

"Would you mind stepping out and showing me how you go in the mornings—since you still have your hat and coat on?" He went into the front hall and got his own coat.

Arthur led him through the kitchen and out the back door. I fought down an urge to slip on my coat and follow them. Arthur would be all right, I told myself. I'd already done enough to protect him from needless harassment. Perhaps too much. Would he miss the bayonet at once and tell the inspector about it himself?

- From the kitchen window I watched them pacing side by side along the driveway, deep in conversation. Later they went up the outside stairs to Arthur's apartment. They were there a long while. I felt sure the inspector managed to get a good look at Arthur's left hand, and probably to search his quarters pretty thoroughly, too, without appearing to do so.

By the time Arthur came in for dinner, most of the girls were home. I was surprised to learn that the inspector had gone away without coming back into the house.

Dinner was a somber meal that night, eaten in almost complete silence—the silence that reigns when each person is lost in his own thoughts. Even Jessie's spirits seemed to have been damped by the events of the morning.

Dr. Melton came to see Polly that evening, and afterwards he held a long conference with Jessie in the kitchen. I sup-

posed that they were talking about Polly's condition and began to grow concerned when the minutes passed and the indistinct tones of his voice still droned on, nearly drowned by the clatter of Jessie's typically energetic dishwashing.

Jessie was pouring the doctor a second or third cup of coffee when I went into the kitchen and asked him whether our tragedy had set back Polly's recovery.

"Not exactly, Mrs. Byers," he replied.

He slipped his pipe surreptitiously into his pocket, as if its aroma had not already penetrated to the front hall and beyond. "She's rallying nicely, but she's begun having nightmares again. I believe she can move back upstairs. In fact, I think it advisable."

"Yes, I shouldn't care to sleep alone down here myself. I'll have Arthur take her bed up."

"Arthur's gone out, Mrs. Byers," said Jessie. "He went to get some lecture notes he missed by coming home early. But I can move Polly's bed up for you."

"I daresay you can, Jessie," nodded Dr. Melton. Then, turning to me, "I understand you've had a detective from Homicide here this afternoon."

"Inspector Franklin."

"What's his theory?"

"I'm not in his confidence," I said. "I don't know that he has a theory yet."

"I'm something of a detective myself, Mrs. Byers—have to be, in my line. I've seen some grim sights in my day.

"What strikes me about this girl's death is that there was only a single wound, and that scarcely a fatal one."

"*Scarcely fatal?*" I said, moving round to the stove and helping myself to coffee.

"Why, the girl was still alive when you found her, and she must have been lying there for hours. It was exposure that killed her, as much as that wound—bad as the wound was."

"And what is your theory?" I asked him.

"That I shall keep to myself for the time being," he said, adopting a little of his pompous sickroom manner. "I must be going—three more calls to make." He retrieved his coat and his bag from a chair in the breakfast nook. "Keep on with the nightly bromides, Jessie, and try a bouillon cube in her eggnog."

I regretted not having taken a bromide myself that night as I lay awake listening to the noises of the old house and thinking of poor Alice Weldon lying stiff and cold at the mortuary. Thinking, too, of that horrid weapon at the bottom of

the mahogany wardrobe. I wasn't prepared to believe that I was nursing a viper in my bosom, or that my sister's son was a callous murderer of strange young women, military training or not. But I saw hard days ahead for Arthur unless Inspector Franklin found some more likely suspect in the case, and I prayed that I had done right in concealing that weapon.

Next afternoon Alice's aunt and uncle came to the house to collect her things. They seemed decent enough people, well on in years and evidently not prosperous.

Mrs. Patterson became somewhat noisy in the accusative case, suggesting I know not what dark things about my rooming house. But her eyes were dry and hard, and she seemed to think of Alice Weldon as an investment gone astray rather than as a child who had died.

"We thought she was planning to stay at the Y. W. C. A.," said her husband. I believe they were the only words I heard him speak. I felt sorry for him. His reticence was a surer token of grief than her peevish ranting.

For a day or two the newspapers made much of us, as newspapers will. We grew hardened to the sight of the curious and the morbid-minded

gawking at us from the sidewalk at all hours and trooping through the alley for no other reason than to view the spot where Alice Weldon had lain dying.

There was an inquest, of course, which Jessie and I were required to attend, but no new evidence was submitted and the inevitable verdict was murder by some unknown person.

That evening things seemed to be getting back to normal at our place. Polly Gerard appeared at the supper table for the first time in weeks, and the buzz of conversation was as lively as ever. Afterwards, when the table had been cleared and the room transformed once again into a sitting room, the girls took up their regular activities as if Alice Weldon had never come into their lives. Jan was back at her jigsaw puzzle, while Beverly nodded over a novel, and our two teachers, Iris and Mary, sat on opposite sides of the table correcting papers. Gussy Warren worked at knitting a cardigan for her brother when she was not fiddling with the dials of the radio.

It was that evening that I overheard a curious conversation between Arthur and Jessie. I had no intention of eavesdropping, but having heard a few words as I passed through the back hall, I found

I could neither advance nor retreat without hearing more.

Arthur seldom invaded our sitting room after dinner, but he would often sit in the kitchen with his coffee and chat with Jessie as she did the washing up. When there was leftover dessert to be begged, he would even take up a dishtowel and help.

"Who's got a key to my place besides me?" he was asking.

"Just your Aunt Vi, I'd say," answered Jessie. She rinsed something at the tap and laid it on the drainboard.

"What about before I moved in? Wasn't there somebody else living up there for a while?"

"Not recently. About three years ago your aunt rented the apartment to a navy recruiter, Ensign Coles, and his wife. But they only stayed a couple of months."

"Did they have a key to the house?"

"Oh, no. I'm sure they didn't. Mrs. Coles cooked their meals on a hotplate, or they went out." I missed a few words while she scraped out the stewpan into the cat's dish. Our tabby Etcetera streaked past me on her way from the sitting room to the kitchen.

"Inspector Franklin seems to think whoever killed Alice Weldon got into the house somehow, dragged her out into

the yard, and then killed her," said Arthur.

"It gives me the shivers, thinking of somebody prowling around inside the house and none of us knowing it. Just leave those—they go under the sink."

"It's a good thing none of you did know it; otherwise you might be as dead as Alice Weldon."

"You don't think he broke in meaning to kill her, then?"

"I don't think he broke in at all. The police didn't find any indication that he did."

"You think it's somebody with a key to the house, don't you?" I could almost feel her shudder through the wall. "You ought to tell your aunt. She could have the locks changed."

There was a long silence. "I don't think that would be of much use," said Arthur at last. How accurate that statement would prove in the light of later events!

A week to the day after the murder, Inspector Franklin paid us another call. Jessie and I had gone marketing together, as we often did. On our return Doris informed me that the inspector was waiting in the front parlor. I asked Jessie to put on a pot of coffee, and went myself to invite him to come back into the sitting room.

"It's more comfortable here," I said, adjusting the Venetian

blinds at the east window.

He nodded in his quiet way, and when I placed an ashtray at his elbow, he smiled appreciatively and drew out a packet of cigarettes.

He seemed strangely reluctant to open the interview, perhaps remembering that matters had become strained at our first meeting.

"Are there any new developments?" I asked at length.

"None, I'm afraid. We've checked up very thoroughly on the dead girl's past, her family background and her connections in Mooreton. There isn't the slightest indication that she had an enemy in the world. No one besides her came to Bradford that night by train. The last Greyhound from the direction of Mooreton arrived at two o'clock in the afternoon."

"Her killer could have preceded her. Her plans were no secret."

"Good for you. But I only said the Greyhound arrived. I didn't say anyone got off."

"So you've come back to us for another look at the scene of the crime? And I thought by now that we'd all been exonerated." I do not know what led me to bait him so—perhaps it was the bright spring sunshine that flooded the room that morning, chasing away shadows physical

and mental and making the death of Alice Weldon seem very remote and scarcely real.

His hand was at his ear, carrying with it a cigarette that threatened to singe his hair. "No one will be exonerated," he said simply, "until the true murderer is known."

"You're still not satisfied about Arthur?"

"It's my opinion that Arthur knows more about the murder than he has told. I hope you've had no further unpleasantness here?"

"Not since the Pattersons left," I remembered ruefully.

"I understand that your invalid is much better."

"Polly is fine," I assured him, wondering where he had obtained his information. The mystery was solved later when I learned that he had quizzed a reluctant Doris at length before my return home.

Jessie brought coffee then, and he invited her to stay, but she declined politely, saying she had to put away the meat. When she had gone, Inspector Franklin rose and, to my surprise, closed the kitchen door behind her.

"Seems a sensible enough girl," he remarked quietly, not resuming his seat but prowling slowly round the room with his coffee cup in one hand and his saucer in the other. "Not given

to idle imaginings or groundless frights?"

"Certainly not. Why do you ask?"

"Are you aware that Jessica Frazer has been to the police and made a statement regarding curious happenings in the house? No? I thought not."

"What curious happenings?" I demanded in astonishment.

"Sounds during the night. Objects unaccountably moved in the studio where Alice Weldon slept and, I believe, in this room."

"But I know nothing of this. When is it supposed to have happened?"

"On the third and fourth nights after the murder."

I drew myself up and was turning in my seat to call Jessie back into the room when he raised his hand in a peremptory gesture of prohibition. "Let her tell you in her own good time," he said. "It may be only her imagination, after all. But I shall have to look into it."

Gone was the bright optimism of a spring day, driven out by a chill blast of fear. "But, inspector, what does all of this mean? Are we to have a second murder before the police have solved the first one?"

He seemed taken aback by the asperity of my tone. "I sincerely trust not. But we are up against something inexplicable

here. On the one hand we have a killer who strikes apparently without motive and disappears. On the other, a house full of people which someone seems able to enter at will in spite of locked doors."

I remembered Arthur and Jessie's conversation. "Do you think I should have the locks changed?"

"I was going to suggest it. And you ought to have bolts put on, too."

"Oh, very well. That will mean that someone will have to get up and let Arthur in when he has to stoke the furnace, but the cold weather is nearly over, anyway."

He stopped opposite the sideboard and stood pondering Jan's jigsaw puzzle, which was still far from complete. After a minute he tried a piece and found that it fitted. "Amazing, isn't it," he said, "how looking at a puzzle from a new angle sometimes provides an immediate solution?"

"My husband was a great worker of jigsaw puzzles."

"And a great solver of them, I don't doubt," he replied. "I had the honor of knowing Major Byers slightly."

"You didn't tell me that the other day."

"You didn't invite me into your sitting room the other day and give me coffee."

I hardly knew what to say to that, so I said nothing. He stepped back a pace from the puzzle and seemed to go on studying it, though I was sure his thoughts were elsewhere. "Do you know the hardest kind of piece to place in a puzzle?" he asked suddenly, and gave me no chance to answer. "The one you don't know about." He stooped and picked up a piece that had fallen to the floor, holding it up between two fingers for me to see before replacing it on the sideboard.

He spent a great deal of time in the studio, and later I heard him rummaging in the basement. That day he came and said goodbye to me before leaving. In the afternoon a locksmith replaced the locks on the front and back doors, and added sliding bolts that gave the place the look of a prison or a fortress. But I felt more secure when I went to bed that night than I had since Alice's death.

I awoke to black darkness, or rather half awoke, and was turning over to resume my slumber when I felt Etcetera curled up on the covers at my feet. I came fully awake then with a start of horror, for I had put the cat out myself before locking up, and no one had had any occasion that I knew of to go out afterwards.

"I do not know how long I lay there motionless, drenched in an icy sweat, listening for the slightest sound. None came but the sighing of the wind, the ticking of my alarm clock, and the familiar rasp of Mary Dockerty's snoring from across the hall. But at length I decided that I must get up and investigate.

I switched on the lamp beside my bed and noted that it was not quite five o'clock. Etcetera yawned and stretched and turned her head away from the light, resenting the interruption of her nap. I put on my robe and slippers and got a flashlight from my bureau drawer so as not to awaken the whole house by turning on the hall lights.

Once in the hall I turned instinctively toward the rear of the house. The front stairs were exposed on too many sides. Anyone going down them with a flashlight would be plainly visible not only from all parts of the lower hall but from the front parlor and the studio as well. I shone my flash briefly down the length of the back stairs and, finding nothing more sinister than a dustpan out of its proper place, I descended quickly in the dark.

It was so cold in the lower hall that I felt sure the back door must be open. No sound

came to my straining ears. I reached round the frame of the kitchen door and pressed the light switch, drawing courage from the answering flood of light. A glance at the back door showed that the bolt was still in place. But in the next instant I recoiled against the icebox, cowering in terror at what I had seen on the floor.

Jessie Frazer lay crumpled before the stove in her nightgown, robe, and slippers. Her contorted features wore a bright flush, and her eyes were open and staring. I did not need to go closer to know that it was the police I must call, and not the doctor.

I went round the downstairs putting on light after light before going to the telephone. Even then I kept looking over my shoulder down the bright, cold, empty hall, and I spoke in such a faint whisper that the man at police headquarters had to ask me to talk louder. I didn't know what had happened to Jessie exactly, but I felt certain that if she had been murdered, the murderer must still be in the house, for the front door was still as securely bolted as the back one.

After hanging up the telephone I slumped down where I was and wept silently. I do not think I have ever felt so alone and afraid as I did then. Alice

Weldon had been practically a stranger, but in Jessie I had lost a bosom friend and loyal companion. I did not move until I heard the police knocking at the front door.

Then in an instant everyone in the house was up, and the whole place erupted in a fresh storm of horror and hysterics. The police searched the house with a thoroughness bordering upon indecency, but found no intruders.

Inspector Franklin appeared shortly, an unshaven Inspector Franklin looking very gray and haggard in the garish electric light. He spent some time in the kitchen with the police officers and then sought me out. I told him all I knew.

"He's got round us, hang it all!" he exclaimed, hammering his fist into his palm. "I thought the bolts would keep him out, but—"

"Then it is murder?"

"Murder made to look like suicide. We found a hypodermic of cyanide under the table in the kitchen. Her fingerprints are on it, but they're the wrong way round. It's murder, all right."

"Dear God! Why? Who did it? If you know, it's your duty to tell me."

"If I knew, Mrs. Byers, I wouldn't be here wringing my hands like a milk maid."

"Do you suppose that, after all, Jessie was his intended victim when he killed Alice—that he was misled by the night-gown?"

But he was in no mood for hazarding theories.

Someone had gone across the yard and roused Arthur, and presently he appeared in our midst, blinking and shaking his head. One of the policemen made coffee, for no one else would set foot in the kitchen. And no one thought of complaining that it was too strong as we huddled numbly round the sitting room, watching the first streaks of dawn as on that dreadful morning a week before.

I sent Doris with a cup of coffee for the inspector, but she came back with it saying that he was nowhere in the house. Yet a few moments later he stepped out of the studio into the hall. He seemed somehow altered, more in command of himself. A cigarette was in his mouth, but he had forgotten to light it.

"Come in here a minute, will you, Mrs. Byers?" he said, drawing me into the studio. "I'm going to show you something about your house that you don't know yourself."

He went to the window next to the fireplace, pulled up on the broad wooden sill as if it

had been a trunk lid, and then thrust outward. At once the entire window, frame and all, swung away almost noiselessly like a huge door, leaving a yawning gap in the wall.

"This explains a lot, I think," he said. He pulled the window shut again.

"It explains how that mahogany wardrobe got in here," I said. "A furniture mover once assured my husband that it must have been made in this very room, since it wouldn't go out through the door."

"It also explains how the murderer came and went. I barely touched the frame of the window just now from the outside and it swung right open."

"But why should anyone build such a contrivance into a house?"

"Just the thing for a studio, to bring in blocks of stone and take out the finished sculptures."

"It was a painter's studio."

"Finished canvases, then. This ought to be closed up at once. Tell you what—I'll have a builder here this morning. But first I want my man to go over these painted surfaces for fingerprints."

No one went out to work that day. Even Arthur stayed home. Before lunch Iris and Mary came to tell me their mothers insisted that they move out of the house immediately. There

would not have been time for their mothers, away in Shelbyville, to learn of what the papers tritely but inevitably called the "Second Nightgown Murder" unless one of them had called her mother long-distance to report it.

Inspector Franklin was as good as his word. By mid-afternoon the carpenters had come and gone, leaving behind them no trace of their work except the clean smell of freshly sawed pine. After supper I shut myself in the studio and opened the secret compartment at the bottom of the wardrobe. It was empty!

I felt I had to discuss this new development with someone at once—but how admit to Arthur that I had spirited away his bayonet? How explain to Inspector Franklin the complicated motives that had led me to do so? I decided to confide in Dr. Melton, who had for years been a trusted family retainer. He had already shown an interest in our troubles—had, indeed, been involved in them from the first.

I put on my coat, and without telling anyone where I was going, I walked down the alley to the doctor's house. His yellow roadster stood in the open garage. My knock at the back door was answered by Mrs. Melton.

"Is it a professional call, Mrs.

Byers?" she asked, with the slight sneer that seemed never to leave her face. I had often felt the doctor was not particularly happy in his home life.

She led me to his cramped, smokefilled study, where he was reading at his desk by a green-shaded lamp. He put away his book and motioned me into a leather armchair. He listened in silence to my tale, nodding sagely from time to time and puffing furiously at his pipe.

"You haven't said anything about this to Inspector Franklin, then?" he asked when I had finished.

"No. I did what I did to spare Arthur the torment of being questioned about that bayonet. If I tell the inspector about it now, it will go all the harder for Arthur."

"But you'll want to recover the family papers that were taken."

"That's a mere inconvenience. It's the bayonet that I'm worried about now. It may have been the weapon that killed Alice. It probably has Arthur's fingerprints on it. It certainly has mine."

He pondered that for a long while, toying with the articles on his desk. "Mrs. Byers, my advice to you is to make a clean breast of it all to the police. That's the soundest policy after all, and you'll see it will all

come right in the end. Tomorrow will do. The inspector needs his rest like everybody else. Do you know what I'd advise you to do tonight? Move that nephew of yours into the house. He's a stout lad, but he can't do you any good away in the top of that garage."

"Then you think we're still in danger?" I told him about the closing up of the false window in the studio.

"Danger is a hard thing to measure before the fact," he said sententiously, hammering the ashes from his pipe into a battered brass bowl at his elbow. "Get the boy into the house with you. Has he got a revolver?"

"Not as far as I know."

I thought he was on the point of lending me one, but he did not.

Arthur readily agreed to sleep in the studio, but it was very late, almost eleven, before he carried in a few things in a suitcase and I bolted up the house for the night.

I could not sleep that night. Several times I put on the light to look at the clock, and the last time I remember it was about half past two. Shortly after that I thought I heard a creaking sound from the front stairs, as if someone were coming slowly and

stealthily up from the front hall.

I suppose the events of the past few days had strung my nerves nearly to the breaking point. At another time I should probably have assumed that one of the girls had gone down to get a glass of milk, but on this occasion I was convinced that an intruder had managed yet again to enter the house.

Resisting an impulse to bury my head under the covers, I slipped out of bed and, without turning on the light, went to the door of my room. "Is that you, Arthur?" I asked, in a voice meant to carry only to the stairs.

"Yes. Are you all right, Aunt Vi?"

"I suppose so. You gave me a fright just now, coming up the stairs in the dark."

"There's something I want to show you in the basement."

"What is it? Can't it wait until morning?" I felt rather than saw him moving along the stair rail toward me.

"No, it can't. I've found a box of pictures and letters hidden in the furnace."

"In the furnace!"

"You'd better come and see."

"Why don't you put on the lights?"

He switched on a flashlight then, and waited in the hall while I put on my robe and slippers before leading me down

the back stairs and through the kitchen. At the basement door he stood aside and let me pass, shining his flash down the stairs instead of switching on the light. As I reached the foot of the stairs, something happened. His flash abruptly went dark, and I no longer heard his step behind me.

"Arthur?" I said sharply. There was no answer.

I wanted to rush back up the stairs and switch on the electric light, but I sensed that someone or something was there, crouching motionless on the stairs above me in the dark. Stifling a scream of terror, I retreated into the basement.

Have you ever noticed how familiar places and objects become strange and inimical in the dark? I dashed against laundry tubs that seemed to lean at an angle to their customary position, and furnace pipes reached down silently from between the joists to brush my hair.

"Arthur?" I called again. Suddenly I heard someone near me, behind me. I started to turn but in an instant I felt a strong hand clapped over my mouth, drawing my head up and back against a heaving chest. I clawed and beat frantically at the arm that held me, but in vain. A chilling sensation of despair came over me as, unable to cry

out, I waited a seeming eternity for the plunge of a knife into my throat. My head swam. I thought I heard hammering overhead, followed by a crash. Lights shone somewhere. I was dragged back into darkness and then, just when my nerves seemed unable to endure more, a fearful explosion burst over me, and I sank back into merciful oblivion.

I awoke many hours later in a hospital room with my head bandaged and a nurse in a starched white uniform and cap reading a book by the window. She looked up as I stirred, and then I dropped off again to sleep.

It was nearly dark when I awoke next, and the first face I saw was Inspector Franklin's. He sat leaning forward in a chair drawn up next to my bed, his elbows on his knees. "How are you feeling, Mrs. Byers?" he asked, with what seemed an excessive degree of solicitude for a police detective.

"My head hurts," I said, in a voice that sounded thick and drunken. "Where is Arthur?"

"Your nephew," he said, setting his teeth for the task, "died a hero's death."

"Arthur is dead?" I tried to sit upright but fell back as though I had been struck.

"Don't distress yourself un-

duly, Mrs. Byers. Arthur has been dead, as nearly as we can tell, for about a year. We believe he was killed by enemy fire near Verdun. The young man you have been entertaining in your home since September is an impostor named Charles Lawrence Beale."

"But that's impossible! I've known Arthur since he was an infant. There is some mistake."

"Fingerprints never lie, Mrs. Byers. I assure you there is no mistake. I believe it had been about seven years since you'd seen your nephew when Charles Beale came to live with you."

"At least that. My sister lived in Des Moines, and they couldn't afford to travel much."

"There you are, then. Any differences between Arthur Sims and Charles Beale you would put down to your nephew's passage into manhood and his military experience."

"But there *were* no differences! Have you seen photographs of my nephew as a boy?"

"Yes, several, and I agree there is a striking resemblance. Indeed, that seems to have been what induced Beale to change places with Arthur Sims."

"Change places! For what reason?"

"For two reasons. First, because Charles Beale was about to be court-martialed and very

likely executed for a crime that needn't concern us. Second, because he knew that Arthur Sims had a wealthy aunt with no children."

"Do you mean to say that this Charles Beale killed Arthur?"

"No. He's admitted killing Alice Weldon and Jessica Frazer, but he steadfastly maintains that Arthur was killed in action. Beale and your nephew went to radio school together. The officers were continually getting them mixed up. They went to the front together, too, and it was there that Arthur learned that both of his parents had died. Somewhere along the way he told Beale about his rich, widowed, childless Aunt Vi and her mahogany wardrobe with a secret compartment full of documents and money."

"Money? There's been no money in it for years."

"It was the documents he was after, to help establish his identity and his claim to your estate after—"

"Go on, say it, inspector. After he'd killed me."

"Beale claims he only got the idea of impersonating Arthur after Arthur was killed. He was in serious trouble with the authorities, and he thought if he weren't killed by a shell he'd probably be shot by a firing squad. Then nearly his whole division was wiped out in a

night raid. He switched papers and dogtags with Arthur and—burned Arthur's hands to prevent identification. But the body was never found, and Beale was reported missing in action. Meanwhile he'd taken up Arthur's identity among people who had hardly known Arthur. Later he remembered about you and the compartment in the wardrobe. After his discharge, as Arthur Sims, he got in touch with you. You know the rest."

I lay quite still, trying to take it all in. The inspector fidgeted in his chair and I knew that he wanted a cigarette but wasn't going to allow himself one.

"I never thought Arthur knew how to open that compartment," I said after a time.

"Apparently he didn't. It was several months before Beale found a way to get into the studio at night. He discovered the false window frame when he took down the storm windows just a few days ago. But the first night he slipped into the studio through the window, he couldn't get the compartment open. The second time he took along his bayonet to pry up the lid, unaware that Alice Weldon was sleeping in the room. She awakened and surprised him at his work, and with a soldier's instinct he seized her, dragged her into the yard, and—you know what he did.

"When he found next day that the bayonet was missing, he thought at first that the police had it. As time went on he became convinced we didn't, since he hadn't been arrested or questioned about it. It was the piece of the jigsaw puzzle that I didn't have, remember? Then something that Jessica Frazer said led him to believe that she was a danger to him. She'd seen and heard things, and he believed it was only a matter of time before she deduced his guilt. He even thought she had the bayonet.

"Perhaps if he'd known she'd already gone to the police he'd have left her alone. But she told no one in the house about that, and so he killed her. He arranged for her to let him into the house that night after midnight, saying he had some new information to discuss with her. That wasn't hard to manage.—Beale says she was sweet on him—"

"I'm sure her feelings toward him were purely maternal."

"However that may be, they cost her her life. He tried to get her to talk about her suspicions, but she wouldn't. That convinced him that she suspected him, and he killed her with an injection of cyanide he'd prepared."

"But where did he get it, and the hypodermic syringe?"

"He stole them from a laboratory at the technical college. After killing Jessie he went up and searched her room. Then he attacked the wardrobe, managed to force open the secret compartment, and emptied it. He bolted the doors and made his exit by the false window, thinking that we'd conclude either that Jessica Frazer had died by her own hand, or that the murderer was someone living in the house.

"He got a shock, of course, when he found that bayonet in the secret compartment of the wardrobe. That pointed to you as the greatest danger to his safety, and he altered his program, moving up the date of your death to the present."

"The date of my death," I repeated with a sigh. "It very nearly was, too. Who—rescued me? I seem to remember someone tramping down the basement stairs—"

"It was Dr. Melton's warning that saved you—that and the fact that we found fresh fingerprints on the false window frame belonging to a man who was supposed to have been killed in the war. We put things together pretty quickly after that, and came down with a warrant for Beale's arrest in the middle of the night. Only he wasn't there. We broke into his place and found a cache of family docu-

ments he'd taken from the wardrobe. We never dreamed he was inside the house at that time. But we met the doctor patrolling the alley, very uneasy for your safety, and when we compared notes and he told us 'Arthur' had moved into the house, we didn't waste any time getting in ourselves."

"Then it was you who rescued me?"

His little finger made a bee-line for the rim of his ear. "The doctor and a couple of policemen and I."

I put my hand to my throbbing and thickly bandaged head. "What—what happened to me?"

"I'm afraid I must take full credit for that," he said. "When we rushed into the cellar, Beale had that bayonet at your throat. It was no time for talk, and the light was bad—I snatched up a washboard and swung it at him and —"

"And missed."

"Indeed I did not miss. Beale

has more than thirty stitches in his scalp. You have only seven."

"Thank you very much." We fell silent after that, as the shadows thickened in the room. A nurse came in and took my temperature and pulse, and asked a number of banal questions such as only a nurse could think of. At least she didn't drive my visitor away.

"And so Arthur didn't come back after all," I said thoughtfully. "Probably he wasn't so handy with a rifle or—or a bayonet. It scares you to think what kind of people survive a war, inspector."

"My son," he said, in that deathly quiet voice of his, "is buried in the Ardennes."

"I am so sorry. It's not for us to fix the blame, but one likes to understand. What does it mean, all this killing, and when will it end?"

"God knows, Mrs. Byers," he replied, with something like a shudder. "I don't."

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UNSOLVED

by Hubert Phillips ("Caliban")

Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?

The answer will appear in the December issue.

.....

"Have you found out any more about these Dragonflies?" said Inspector Gimlett to his deputy.

"A little, sir," said Sergeant Snipe. "There certainly is such an organization; but whether it's subversive or not I haven't so far discovered."

"Then what have you discovered?"

"That there's a lot of mumbo jumbo connected with it. I learned something from a bloke who was once a member. To communicate with the Head Dragonfly—or whatever the fellow's called—one had to begin by ringing up a phone number. The number was 0588, but my informant couldn't remember the exchange. Then one had to give, in succession to a series of questions, three other numbers: each of them of four digits. My bloke could only remember the last, which—he's sure of this—was 7647. At that time, by the way, they called themselves the Seventeenth International."

"They did, did they?" said Gimlett, who was doodling on his blotting pad.

"So he said. It seems pretty pointless to me."

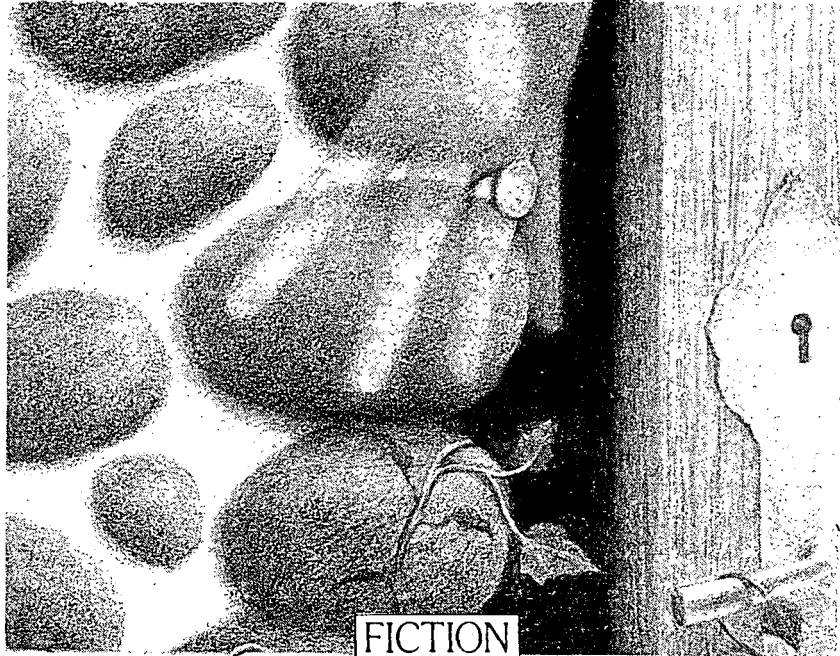
"Pointless," murmured Gimlett. "Maybe you've got something there, Snipe."

What, presumably, were the other two numbers?

.....

See page 145 for the solution to the October puzzle.

"The Dragonflies," taken from My Best Puzzles in Logic & Reasoning by Hubert Phillips ("Caliban"). Copyright © 1961 by Dover Publications, Inc., N.Y., N.Y.



FICTION

An American Visit

by F. M. Maupin

Gwillam Eyer, aged eighteen and very angry with himself, gazed through the ruined door at his unwelcome house-guests spread out on his lawn. Because it *was* his lawn, he told himself resentfully: and his ruin, and his land, and, incidentally, his ghost. And his country!

He knew that most Americans were not like this, he knew they weren't, to go around barging into English houses. They were not typical, it was some nightmare: and there he stood, the spineless fool that he was, wholly unable to cope. But, in the same moment, his painful reserve returning, he knew that he could never tell them to leave.

He was never going to be able to manage anything. They were perfectly right: he was even afraid of a ghost.

"Will-ll-ll-ly!"

Illustration by Barbara Roman

He shuddered, and not from the cold vault behind him. He hated nicknames.

"Pull yourself together, Eyer," he told himself miserably, "you just have to tell them to go. You didn't invite them, you don't want them, so why can't you tell them to shove off?"

Well, he heard his own conscience remind him, they'll say you got sore—that's the phrase—when we dared you to look in that church.

And did you?

Yes, I did.

"Now, no kidding," he heard Bob's ponderous voice saying, "is it true that you English believe in hoodoo—you know, ghosts and all that? I read a paper about it, scientific. How half of you English won't go in their own house on account of the spooks. Is that so?"

"Certainly not."

Gwillam cursed them once, well, in flawless Cantabrigian, and then for good measure in Welsh. But he felt no better.

"Now, see here," he told himself firmly, "you're going to go through this church once, thoroughly. There's nothing in here but yourself—nothing to be afraid of. You're not afraid, are you? And then you're going to go out there and tell them to pack up and go. Is that clear?"

It was clear. And he shivered.

"Oh, tell me," he found himself raging, "how did you get yourself into this mess in the first place?"

It was the ring he was wearing that started the whole affair.

He had been coming down here from Northampton, from his aunt's house—there were still details from his mother's death—and they had all piled on in Stratford. They not only took over the carriage, they had openly boasted among themselves that their tickets were second, not first.

In that odd American way, they had used the nominative of address with every breath, so it was impossible not to know their names: Bob and Pat, and the little one was Honey. They went to some strange university, and were a year or so older than he. Gwillam, who had no wish to be drawn into their chatter, had sunk into his corner, staring at the green fields outside where his own thin face floated in the air. Much good it had done him. Honey had leaned over, swooped up his hand in hers, and stroked the gold band on his finger.

"Oh, isn't that cute!" she exclaimed. "Is that a school ring?"

Gwillam looked at her blankly. School had been for him, till this year, the small class at the vicarage; and he pulled back his hand.

"I don't know what you mean."

The rounded English "o" sounded cold and unfriendly even to his ear, so he reluctantly added, "I can't take it off; it's too small for me. It's a family ring."

Bob had put down his ubiquitous newspaper and regarded him owlshly.

"You a duke or something?"

Gwillam, his color rising, said, "I'm not a duke."

The dark one, Pat, drew herself up with that impossible air she affected, and said distantly, "We wanted to meet some members of the British upper classes."

"Yeah," put in Bob, "live in a castle, and all that jazz."

Live in a castle? Gwillam found himself grinning. As much as he loved the far-flung line of fortresses that crowned the hills of Wales—and he did love them, passionately, with all the inherited love of his forebears—he would hardly have lived in a castle. A bit drafty, what?—when all that rain poured in? Perhaps they were thinking of Scotland?

He said, "Well, we live in a house that was built in the fifteen hundreds—I mean, I live there. Part of it, rather, the part Cromwell didn't get. But there're ruins there older than that, going back to King Edward. There's a piece of a priory, and a chapel. Really it's a church, but a little one. Nobody ever goes into that, though. There's a curse on it."

Honey had squealed so ecstatically that he had jumped.

"A curse? Not really? A real ghost?"

Bob had begun on the hoodoo then, and the English. His argument had been, not that the English believe in ghosts, but that they were "scared of" them. He thinks we're Jamaicans, Gwillam had thought; no, Haitians, with oo-angas and pins sticking in them.

"Certainly not."

"Ooh, you're just wonderful," Honey had cooed. "I think it's the most exciting thing I ever heard. Do go on. Tell us about the ghost."

So, of course, he had.

Now, in the brilliant summer afternoon, he stared through the vine-draped door of his own ruined church, to the sunlit lawn where his guests lingered over the crumbs of their picnic. His dislike was so strong that it startled him. Was he really angry at himself? Did he really hate them, or himself? How did he let them get him into

this place at all? Well, they believed he was afraid.

And was he afraid?

Yes, he was.

He turned and, blinded by the sunlight, peered into the murk of the ruin.

It was a tiny place, really—it would have fitted in toto into a good-sized Mayfair drawing room—and was intact except for some missing stones at this door and the far one. Built in barrel style, the three vaults made three separate tunnels, parallel to each other, and each invisible to the others, except as you passed the spaces between the thick pillars. The sun never shone here, for the round, grudging windows had long since been sealed by the ivy, as the other door was sealed; and as this door had been before Bob had torn the stems aside, covering his hands with the viscous sap which the limbs spat out.

Gwillam said angrily, aloud, "I'm alone. There's nothing in here but myself. I'm alone. I'm alone."

"Oh-hhh-hhh," breathed the vault over his head, and kept quiet. Alone?

Cato—no, Cicero—it was Cato: what is the worst that could possibly happen? If you know that, you're no longer afraid. Well, you could die. In an empty building? Killed—whatever next!—by a man six hundred and fifty years dead himself? How could you? Gwillam's father was dead, somewhere over the Channel: and Gwillam, well-taught by the vicar, by no means supposed that they would meet in this world.

"... the time was, then the brains were out, the man would die, and there an end . . ."

How did it go on?

"... but now they rise, with twenty trench-ed gashes on their heads to push us from our stools . . ."

So he had a good memory for verse, and why shouldn't he? Any lad in the village could sing all the hymns in the book, by memory. And there, as the play said, an end.

There an end?

He looked down at the torch in his hand. Honey had pressed it on him, limping out.

"I like to broke my neck," she said, "you've got holes in that church of yours. My foot went right through the floor—" and at his expression, she said, "I declare it did. Isn't that so, Pat? Oh, you-all had left. Well, I beat it right out of there, after that stone broke. Here, you take this, Willy. It's your turn now to go in there,

unless—" she paused just for a second too long "—unless you don't want to."

Holes in the floor, a stone floor? She must have tripped on some up-ended paving, he would have to be careful.

So he really was going to look through the place, wasn't he?

"Like you said," Bob had grunted, "that ghost has it in for you in particular. He won't show up for us."

Gwillam felt cold fear, laid like a wet snake across his chest and stomach.

Talk to an American about his money; a Frenchman, his mistress; a German, his theories; an Englishman, his place in the country. It works every time. But how did they get invited? He had no more thought of inviting them than of asking his tenants to come in for tea.

And yet, here they were.

He had started to talk about the farm, of course; but they wanted more of the ghost. And so—because in truth he loved to speak of home—he had begun to tell the old story.

"It was really a question of family," he had told them. "It made a lot of difference which was the older son. My ancestor was the younger brother, and he wanted his elder brother dead so that his own sons could inherit. He locked his brother up in the tower—there're pieces of that around, too—and starved him."

"To death?"

"Oh, yes, to death."

"And nobody did anything to him?" asked Honey, shocked.

"Nothing except the curse, no."

Gwillam had gone on to explain about the curse. The dying man had sold his soul to the devil—so the story went—in exchange for his life.

"But you said he died."

"He did—but he was to come back to life. He was to stay dead until his grave was opened again, and the first man to see his dust was to change places with him, while he came back to life again."

"What do you mean, change places with him?"

Gwillam was rather enjoying this. He usually found it hard to talk to people he did not know, but this rapt attention was very flattering.

"Well, in his grave, I suppose. We always thought that the curse was meant to light on one of our family—you know, to wipe out our line, too, as his had been stopped. I think that was the idea.

The children from the village, they sometimes play in there—but we've never gone in. The church he was buried in, I mean. It's not consecrated any more. It's just a ruin."

"You're saying," said Bob, incredulous, "that your family won't go in this church, for fear of running into that spook?"

"Well, in a way, yes."

"Your father never went in there?"

"No, he didn't."

"Because of a spook. Now, I call that chicken!"

The color flared in Gwillam's fair cheeks; he could feel it burn. He said carefully, "My father was killed in the war, before the Americans came in."

Bob stared at him, his mouth open like a fish.

But Honey put out her hand and said vaguely, "Oh, I'm sorry, how awful, oh, Bob, do let's go down and see this place."

She had quite left out Gwillam as she turned to the others and rattled on. "You never want to go anywhere with anybody we meet, it's half of traveling to get to know the people, how they live and all. Oh, you-all, do say yes, we can take a day off of Edinburgh."

Pat said remotely, "I want to see the castle of the Duke of Argyle. We're related, of course."

"Let's cut out Ee-lie," said Bob suddenly, "just another cathedral, Gee-sus! If I see another cathedral, I'll croak. Okay, couple of days, why not? Might get some sun in. Hate to go back white like this."

Honey hugged him deliriously. "You old dear. I know you'll love this, you'll just love it, ghosts and all."

She turned to the speechless Gwillam.

"Just a few days," she said. "We'd just love it. We'll love your ghost. I think you're sweet."

They hadn't, of course. They had looked at his velvet-green domain with those blank, flitting tourist glances, and dismissed it at once as second rate.

"You call that a river?" asked Honey, amazed. "Now, back home, it's just an itsy-bitsy little creek."

Nor the village either, though he had taken them into the pub, where the village boys, returning from the football match, had—for themselves, not the outsiders—put on a round of singing that would have graced a Continental stage. Gwillam, to whom song came as naturally as breath (it was one of the pains of his youth that he could not go down to play in the village), had listened, heart-wrung, to the liquid language that pressed into the old hymns all the griefs

of mankind; and was outraged when Bob, off-key and strident, began to hum loudly, waving his hand to keep himself in time.

Had they been sympathetic he could even have conquered his shyness to tell them the old legends he loved. It was on that dark mountain opposite where the last of the bards of Wales had flung himself down on rocks, rather than kneel to an English king; and his own kinsmen had most unwillingly been bowed to Edward's heirs.

But none of this interested them. If it had, they might have understood better why the past was such a real thing to him.

"I don't know where my own grandfather came from," Bob had said. "Germany, somewhere. We don't think all that kind of stuff's important."

Well, I do, thought Gwillam mutinously, the past is still alive to me.

You don't say?

In what way?

And curses, too, are they real after almost seven hundred years?

"... it will have blood, they say; blood will have blood; stones have been known to move ..."

He had said, "Of course you can go in; but I won't. Of course I'm not scared of the church. Don't be daft. We just never go in it, that's all. We just never do."

But it didn't work out that way.

He turned the torch over in his hand; it was a big American one, a "flashlight." Darkest England: one should be prepared. He had never spoken this way to them, but he was going to. First once through the church, and then out, and he'd say it.

"Meant to mention it," he would say. "I've been called down to Cardiff, business, you know, the farm. Wish you could stay longer, I really do. It's been splendid." It sounded false even to him. They weren't going to believe him. But at least they couldn't say that he threw them out because he wouldn't go into his own church.

With an awful clearness, there in the darkness, Gwillam realized how much he had been taken in. They had imposed on him, they had imposed on him utterly. He had never been treated this way, he had no defense to put up. If he had left home earlier ... if he had had sisters and brothers ... if his birth had not set him off from the village children ... oh, surely, in time he would learn how to handle such people! But now, as a final imposition, they had goaded him into this place, where his own shattered confidence

was forcing him into a course which he himself saw to be wholly unnecessary.

Unnecessary?

No, not to him. In his desperate confusion and anger he would have done anything, anything, to restore what was left of his pride. He turned on the torch. It was dimming; and the reddish beam of light danced crazily along the curve of the vault.

Through no will of his own, he said softly, aloud, in the melodic Welsh which he almost never used, "Are you there?"

There was no answer but the humming of bees in the clover outside, and a rustle of ivy.

The stone to his touch was cold. He shoved his hand into his pocket, and moved slowly along the tunnel, the dirt thick on the floor at his feet. Ahead of him, the back door gleamed greenly, shut with leaves. Still fighting with each breath the desire to run, he stumbled along the short passage, till he came to the door and stood shaking, emptied of thought. The blood pounded at his throat, and his head swam with the numb sickness of a taker of drugs. He was past turning back. He whispered, his words as precise as before, in his ancestors' tongue, "Are you there?"

The ivy behind him sighed softly, faced out to the sun.

He swung into the tunnel at his right, and staggered down it like a sleepwalker. The dim light of the fading torch splashed in reddish pools on the ancient dirt. Ahead of him now, a shadow broke the floor, and, without words, he recognized it as the stone that had fallen in.

But he inched past it before he turned. Then he came slowly around. The pit gaped open before him, a shadow in the shadows. In that moment he knew—he must have known—but quietly, as hopelessly as a child, he took his hand out of his pocket and held it out, waiting, to the shadow at his feet.

"Come on," he said, "I'm here," and with the other hand shone the light down into the darkness.

Out in the sunlight, the three sat restless. Honey had taken out her mirror and scrutinized her face.

"Did you tell him?" Bob demanded.

"How can you?" said Pat, "I mean, you can't say I'm bored to death so I'm leaving."

Bob looked up from his paper. "It's perfectly simple," he said, exasperated, "just say we have to catch the five-oh-five."

"Honey's going to tell him."

"Well, she better hurry. It's four now. You all packed?"

They nodded. He had worked it all out: a half hour to the station, a half hour to get in and out of the house.

"I think he's glad we're leaving," Pat said. "He doesn't like us."

"Oh, yes, he does," said Honey, "it's just the accent."

"No, he doesn't," said Bob, "not two cents. I wouldn't be surprised if he lit out the back of that place and kept going, just so as not to have to talk to us. I should think the Americans'd be popular around here, us winning the war and all." There was a pause. Then he said, "My God, he's been in there twenty minutes. I bet he lit out back."

Honey stood up. "Oh, look!" she exclaimed, "what's that?"

Pat stood up, too. "Look, Bob," she said, "it's a monk. Didn't Willy say there were monks around here?"

"That was Win-chester."

"It's a judge," Honey said, "you know, in the movie about the French Revolution. The wigs and all."

Bob dragged himself up and looked over the fields. "I don't like that get-up," he said briefly, "looks too much like a dress. Looks funny on a man."

"Not if you've lived in Italy," Pat said coldly.

Honey glanced around. "I think we're being mean," she said. "I'm going in and look for Willy. You coming?"

She set out for the church alone, as the monk, or the judge, or whatever he was, walked on through the distant fields.

It was empty, of course, the church; but Bob had been right. The church had been left by the back, for the ivy was broken. Honey stooped and picked up her flashlight, still lit, from the broken floor. Its weak beam caught a flash of metal, and she leaned and fished up something small from the dirt in the hole. The others were already fixed to go, the picnic remains shoved to one side on the lawn. They decided to leave without saying goodbye. What could they do?—he had gone, he was rude, and not they.

Bob examined Honey's find as she smoothed back her hair. "You can give it to one of his coolies. He's got enough of them 'round, Lord knows."

Pat said suddenly, "I don't like to stay with people; it's murder. Isn't it, Bob?"

He grunted, but Honey was always polite. She took back the golden ring, with its crest, and turned it to gleam in the sun. She was not really listening at all, she was already half on the train. "Murder," she said agreeably, stroking the ring, "absolute murder."

The Man Who Was Too Nice



by John Shea

I suppose that as the sole survivor of this extraordinary affair I should describe myself first, albeit briefly. Because I am a special investigator for the electric company I work for, I must maintain a certain confidentiality. Energy fraud goes on daily, to a disgusting degree, and I am not permitted—nor would I desire—to divulge too much about our methods and personnel. Suffice it to say that my main responsibility is to detect and terminate schemes to defraud my company. On the whole my work is rather dull: cheats are rarely imaginative, although most of them think they are. But this affair was different—tragically so. If only, I now muse, if only . . .

Illustration by George Thompson

Mr. S. Abel first came to my attention when our computers turned up his name. It looked simple enough: potential energy theft. In his immediate neighborhood, all families spent a similar amount of money on electricity, within a few dollars. Indeed, given the near uniformity of consumption about him, Mr. Abel's astonishingly low expenditure was suspicious. Mind you, we had not prejudged him; we are always fair. But Mr. Abel's case deserved a second glance, at least. Mr. S. Abel, 315 Locust Street. With the computer printout in my briefcase, I left my office, got into my unmarked car, and headed for Mr. Abel's neighborhood. Despite the boring sameness of most of my cases, I always feel a thrill when I first set out. This day was no different.

The house in question seemed normal to all appearances. Two stories; small lawn in front; small back yard. There seemed to be no illegal wires connecting Abel's house to the power lines or to any other houses. It did not appear, then, that he was "siphoning," as we call it in the business. But my preliminary superficial investigation was not conclusive, of course; it merely suggested that if indeed something fraudulent was occurring, it was occurring somewhat more subtly than usual. I parked a few houses down and examined my notes. This was a normal neighborhood, of average houses, quiet streets, stolid trees, some red brick, a lot of grey, a touch of green, an American neighborhood running smoothly on American energy. My company supplied the electricity, and everyone consumed heartily. Except Mr. Abel. What was wrong? I do not maintain that one *needs* electricity for survival; but in this day and age, with the present style of living, with all the American products that fill so many households, it appears slightly abnormal when a monthly electricity bill barely breaks two dollars. Sure, this Mr. Abel might be a weirdo, whose religious tenets prohibited the use of appliances or something of the sort—but I was skeptical. His house looked no different from the others on the street.

Let me pass over the less gripping portions of my investigation and proceed to describe the other characters in this incredible affair. The first neighbor I contacted was not very helpful, and appeared not to know Abel very well. "Nice, quiet person," I was told. "No complaints." The second had a similar response: "Abel? No, don't see him much. Quiet, friendly, seems really nice." But my luck improved with the next neighbor.

Mrs. Arlene Davis, divorced; blonde, perhaps fifteen pounds overweight, talkative (very handy for our purposes), friendly, mother of two.

"Oh, you mean *our* Mr. Abel? Funny you should ask! We've had our eyes on him for months now, almost since he moved into 315."

Indeed? Why?

"Oh, I'm not one to talk—except to *official* investigators, you know. But he's definitely strange. We all noticed it, right away."

Strange? How so?

"Well, at first I couldn't really say. *Something* was different about him . . . and I couldn't put my finger on it. Then, after Mrs. Morgan and I had coffee together, I realized what it was. He's too *nice*!"

Too nice? How so?

"Well, you know, he's just too nice! He never shouts or frowns or snaps at you—not that *I* would ever give him a reason. But he's too nice. Like the time I had to borrow his toaster. Well, I was trying to wash it, and I dropped it into the dishwasher. The whole thing made a *terrible* noise, and such smoke! They shouldn't make such dangerous things."

So he has at least one electric appliance. Had, rather. I observed offhandedly to Mrs. Arlene Davis that one had to handle such things carefully; the great gift of electricity was not to be used without proper caution.

"I suppose. But not *one* word from Mr. Abel when I returned the poor thing. I tell you, he's *too nice*!"

Too nice. I underlined the adverb. Perhaps the next informant would be more illuminating. Abel's reputation was interesting, but as yet irrelevant.

Mrs. Virginia Morgan, widow, early sixties, dyed hair, severe expression, eyebrows plucked and penciled in, apparent misanthrope with passion for spying (again, most helpful).

"Now, what did you say you were? . . . Oh, very well. I don't see what right I have to withhold evidence."

Evidence? What sort?

"Conclusive, conclusive. The man's a hypocrite, maybe dangerous."

How so?

"Well, just *look* at the man! Any fool could tell you that there's something evil behind that smile, that simper! He can't fool me."

But evidence?

"Some young hoodlums stole the battery out of his new VW a few weeks ago. I saw the whole thing, right from my window. So what does he say about it? 'Boys will be boys, Mrs. Morgan. I can always get another battery.' Imagine! If those punks had tried for

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my car, I would have plugged them with my husband's old rifle."

Indeed.

"And Luvums bit him the first week he moved in, and he never even raised his voice. Sent *me* a note of apology, and invited me to dinner."

Luvums?

"My schnauzer, of course. He doesn't like hypocrites either. May I see your card again, Mr. . . ."

Did you visit Mr. Abel?

"Are you mad? I didn't trust him the least bit. He probably would have murdered me, or raped me. Or murdered me *after* raping me."

Has Mr. Abel indeed exhibited any violent behavior?

"Oh, not that fox, not in public. He's too shrewd. But just listen to him. 'Nice weather we're having, isn't it, Mrs. Morgan,' when the clouds are as black as the ace of spades. 'Is there anything I can get you at the department stores, Mrs. Morgan?' Oh, wouldn't that be something! And then no doubt he'd be inviting himself in, and eyeing my things. . . . No, no, he's too sneaky. Ask Chalmers if you want some juicy stories. He'll set your ear on fire!"

Vince Chalmers, about thirty-two, married, one child, insurance salesman, sports enthusiast, but more of a spectator than participant. Likes his beers, warms up after the third. (Send voucher to Expenses.)

"Yeah, Abel, he's nuts, if you really want to know. Not that I'm a very judgmental kind of guy, if you know what I mean, but this guy is too nice. Makes me nervous, no kidding. Look, I can dig it, he's a nice guy, but he just goes too far. You know what happened last month? Me and Jerry, that's my son, and Abel, we take in a game at the Garden. Way back we're mugged. *Mugged!* On the goddamn Flushing line! I give 'em my wallet pronto, but Abel starts giving them a line about not pursuing a life of crime. They tell him to cut the crap and hand it over. So he does, but first he apologizes for having only ten bucks! You should see their faces! One socks him good, then they run. I'm goin' crazy, lookin' for a cop on the subway, but *he* just sits there and wipes the blood off, and tells me it's okay. Okay, huh? Sure, and so was Pearl Harbor. He only lost ten, he says. Sure, sure, and that's a nice scar for your trouble."

(Identifying scar? Check available photos.) Anything else?

"Well, like I said, I'm in the insurance business, make a decent living, no complaints. Well, I figure I'll try my new neighbor, you never know. So he says sure, make it accident, home, the whole bit. I get everything done, but you know how it is, things get bogged

down, a little slip here and there. Anyway, old lady takes a tumble on the ice in front of his house, breaks a leg, he's covered, right? Wrong. I goofed. But did he blow up when I told him? No! Not a peep! And guess what? Same day, in the evening, kid throws an iceball through the bay window. What a mess. Glass everywhere, and some old rug he's got is ruined. Again, my fault he's not covered yet, I admit, I'm not perfect, never said I was, but he's all smiles. Tells me not to worry. Now, if that was me, I'd kill me, and then go gunnin' for the little son of a bitch who did it."

So you've been inside?

"Yeah, two, three times. But only in the living room. I think I'll try another Schlitz."

Anything unusual about the interior?

"Nah . . . but he seemed a bit edgy about me staying in that one room. I wanted to check out the basement, see if he'd been getting the same ooze I was. Damn stuff, never did figure what the hell it was."

(Basement, eh? Perhaps Mr. Chalmers has indeed been helpful.)

"I tried the door when he was out in the kitchen gettin' the beers. Must have been five locks on the door. Five goddamn locks! Must keep the crown jewels down there."

Indeed. And what did Mr. Abel say?

"Oh, he joked about it. Some half-assed story about rat poison."

Or perhaps an illegal source of energy? Was Mr. Abel, this nicest of men, methodically stealing electricity from my company with some contraption hidden in his basement? Although I try to reserve judgment, I felt the possibility was quickly becoming a probability. Toaster, probably a refrigerator for the beer-Mr. Chalmers was so fond of, lamps? . . . and how many other appliances? More than two dollars' worth, I would guess! And his apparent pleasantness, his equanimity, his unwillingness to offend, displease, or disturb—all a show to avoid suspicion, to disarm his neighbors? But perhaps he had gone too far the other way. Too nice, indeed. I decided after these interviews to expand my investigation, and at the same time maintain my working relationship with these three informants. All agreed to cooperate. Mrs. Morgan's response was most extreme: she'd do anything to nail the sly bastard. And Luvums would help.

The next day, when Mr. S. Abel got on the subway on his way into Manhattan, I got on with him. As a disguise, I wore a false nose and a bushy brown mustache. Within minutes, the scene was nearly intolerable, and I thanked God that my work did not nor-

mally involve such demanding and dismaying activity. I tried to keep Abel within five feet, but it was difficult. What a torture! In front of me was a burly, grim-faced, slightly malodorous construction worker, who fought for every inch of available standing space, wielding his heavy lunchbox as a club when necessary. Behind me was an angular, grim-faced, overly-perfumed spinster, possibly a senior secretary; each time the train slowed, she would thrust her hand into my back to steady herself. On either side of me were other grim-faced passengers, shaking solemnly, with a slight loss of dignity, as the car rumbled on its way. We were jostled, nudged, pushed, elbowed, trodden upon, kicked, pinched, shoved, breathed upon, bumped, kneed, jabbed, all the while struggling to keep our balance. Yet, despite all the groans and curses and mutters and imprecations from the other passengers, I saw with amazement that a smile continued to play about Abel's lips. Uncanny! Incomprehensible! Or was he smiling as he plotted the slow deaths of each rude brute on the subway? *That* would at least be understandable.

The train came to a halt in a frenzy of shrieking and shuddering, and as the passengers, one distracted body, swayed perilously, the doors slid open. It was the first stop in downtown Manhattan. Mr. Abel, too close to the door, was trampled in the stampede of hot, bothered humanity. When I saw that he was being forced off the train, I managed to get off as well. The doors closed behind me. Abel picked himself off the filthy floor of the station and proceeded to pull the mottled pink wad of gum from the seat of his pants. But it would not come off entirely.

"It's rough in there," I ventured, approaching him casually.

"It sure is. It's too bad I had to get off here. It looks like I'll miss my appointment now."

"Try a cab. They're usually reliable."

He shrugged and smiled sheepishly. "I'd like to, but it appears someone made off with my wallet in the crush." He bent over and plucked a smoldering cigarette stub from the cuff of his trouser leg. It had burnt a small hole.

"That's disgraceful," I said, watching him closely. "Smoking isn't allowed in the subways!"

"Yes, it's too bad, isn't it."

"It's downright *illegal*," I said, stressing the last word, watching for a flicker of guilt on his bland face. Nothing. His eyes remained as calm and forthright as ever. I shook my head. Apparently I was dealing with a master here. Nobody was so nice without a motive,

a profitable reason. What was he hiding? What was his masquerade about?

As he stood on the platform, hands in his pockets, he began to whistle. I felt my jaw hardening. What an actor! One almost had to admire him. But don't worry, Mr. S. Abel, I'll get you. If you're defrauding us, I'll get you. You can bank on it.

Back at my office, I studied the data provided by the computer. Previous address: 425 Riverside Drive. Worth a visit, I thought. Just why had he moved? Unfortunately, rent had included gas and electric, so I would not be able to establish a pattern of energy consumption. But still worth a visit.

Hernandez, the superintendent, seemed quite willing to discuss Mr. Abel, and indeed spoke with some enthusiasm about him. "Great guy, great guy, that Mr. Abel. Man never broke my back about anything, not even the fire."

Fire?

"Oh, yeah, man, you din't hear? Some trash caught on fire in the back elevator on his floor, and almos' wasted the whole damn building!"

How did the trash catch fire?

"Hey, look, man, I don' know, nobody knows."

Had it been in the service elevator long?

"Hey, who remembers, man? Look, got me a whole building to run, no time for that stuff."

But the damage was extensive?

"Jus' Mr. Abel's floor, him, two other apartments. Burned 'em out. Shoulda seen the mess, and what those fire hoses did! My God, almost knocked the walls down!"

So Mr. Abel suffered severe losses?

"Oh, man, you shoulda seen it—all his furniture fried, black an' smokin' like a pile of Big Macs, I couldn't believe it! All his duds gone, too. Woulda killed me, man, to have to start all over. And you shoulda seen the cork."

Cork? This was a provocative detail.

"Yeah, cork, man, you know what cork is? Like the stuff they put in bottles, to keep the wine in? Got it? . . . Well, he had his bedroom *lined* with the stuff, pretty weird, if you ask me, but it's cool, man, it's cool with me, different strokes. Like, he can do what he wants in there, no skin off my nose. This is a free country, man. There's Miss Peterson, in 404. You don' see me bitchin' about her leather trip, hey, with all those chains, do you? And I got a pile of complaints from *her* neighbors."



But not from Mr. Abel's? Provocative. The cork must have been protective. Sounds to be muffled? Does cork conduct? (Check with O'Brian, And send expense voucher to Milly. Talk not so cheap these days.) How did Mr. Abel take it?

"Oh, that's some cool cat, man. Me, I'd a gone off the wall, and done me some breakin'. But he just shrugs and starts to clean up. Strange, but I can dig it. Wish they were all that way. Those others, they were cryin' and shoutin' and runnin' back and forth like there was no tomorrow. Shoulda heard Mrs. Harrison, sayin' the nastiest things I ever heard about God. But Mr. Abel, he just laid back and was pickin' up scraps."

Any other odd details? Were you in his apartment often?

"Often, not so often, it's hard to say, man. Like, he never complained none, so I din't have no cause. Kept another lock on the bedroom door, so I couldn't get in. . . . Odd? You mean kinky, like the cork? . . . Can't say, can't say. He's clean with me, like I say, it's a free country."

No further details? Ever see any unusual *electrical* equipment?

"I think he was into the sun."

Could you clarify?

"Well, I don' know. He got some metal reflectors, like they use to get a tan quicker."

Mr. Abel does not appear very tanned at all. In fact, he seems rather pale.

"Hey, man, you're right. Now I think of it, you're right. But what the hell was he doin' with that stuff, then?"

An excellent question, Mr. Hernandez, an excellent question indeed. Sun reflectors? Or some sort of device to produce solar energy? Mr. Hernandez seemed to remember some wires when I prodded him. To where? From what? The reflectors? But cork? Where did that come in? And what could Abel have gotten in his apartment? He didn't even have use of the roof. Southern exposure, but limited. Strange indeed. We were dealing with a master, that was increasingly evident.

There was little new information from my three neighbors. They had obviously consulted with each other and validated each other's impressions. Mrs. Morgan again said that Abel was "too nice by half." She would not be the least surprised, she said, to discover that he had murdered somebody in the past. Vince Chalmers, apparently fresh from the movies, postulated that Mr. Abel was "some sort of an alien," posing as a human. Or he was fresh from a long business lunch, with too many martinis. Mrs. Arlene Davis, per-

haps inspired by Chalmers, confided that somebody so nice had to have an awful past. "Do you think he could be Hitler's son?" I replied that I did not know. By the time of our conversation, however, I had formed a plan.

"You want me to do *what*?"

"Just a cocktail or two, that's all. I'm asking you to invite him over this evening and chat for a half hour or so. Is that too much to ask?"

"Well, I don't know. . . . He's nice, that's for sure, but . . . too nice. Creepy. What if he gets fresh?"

"Mrs. Davis, has he ever indicated that he might get fresh? Didn't you just say he was too nice? Think of your city, the people of this great city of ours. Think of our great nation. Is this too much to ask? Thirty minutes? It would be much appreciated."

"Oh, dear . . . I suppose I could. Thirty minutes." She touched her blonde bouffant and looked around for a mirror. "What if he won't come?"

"You will have done your duty in any event, Mrs. Davis. Thank you."

This was definitely Condition Sizzle. I was confident the boys upstairs would back me all the way on this one. With my track record, no doubt about it. Condition Sizzle. Take extraordinary measures. For the greater good. So when I spied the slim figure of Mr. S. Abel ambling across his lawn toward the Davis home that evening, a small bouquet of daisies in his hand, I was ready. I was dressed all in black, with a knit cap; my face was blackened with (O irony!) burnt cork. I had my little kit slung over my shoulder. Catlike, I approached the back door of 315 Locust, glanced at my watch, and went to work. Almost instantly, the door gave way to me. I had my plan, so without the least hesitation I made my way to the door to the basement. Vince Chalmers had exaggerated, but only slightly: there were four locks on the door, each looking solid and immovable. But I had come prepared. Let me again pass over these trifling details and pick up my account once I was down the stairway and in the basement.

The room was indeed lined with cork. I rapped against the nearest wall, but the sound was muffled. A clever attempt to make the room soundproof? My attention was quickly fixed upon the odd laboratory scene before me. There were several unfathomable contraptions, new even to me, tubes, beakers, pipettes, strainers, wires, serving some purpose, but what interested me most were the two large lustrous metal screens that dominated the center of

the room. They stood at right angles to each other, and a high stool faced them. They were curiously reminiscent of the plates that absorb the light of the sun and begin the process necessary for solar heating. But these seemed finer, more sensitive, almost like metal foil. I touched one screen and—perhaps it was my imagination—watched the metal turn faintly pink for less than a heart-beat. Both screens were attached by electrical wire to a strange transparent container that seemed to be filled with water. Again, similar to some of the solar heating systems I had seen, but simultaneously much more abbreviated and much odder. And, the most perplexing question: where was the sunlight? Surely there was no source of light or heat in this room. Perhaps, I thought, glancing about the room, there are some papers that would help me to make sense of the whole thing. I darted to the small table against one of the walls, my eye caught by a flash of white. Yes; some papers. But they told me almost nothing. For the most part, it was sheer nonsense. "Try the Deus Amor bit?" I spotted on one page. Latin, I knew that well enough. God Love? Love God? What in the world? Perhaps Hernandez was correct after all, and Abel was involved in some dubious sexual activity. The next sheet contained a drawing that looked more promising: apparently it was a sketch for the unusual system before me. But what was the rough drawing of a man doing in the sketch? His mouth appeared to be open. In ecstasy? Hell, I thought, why can't these people be better draftsmen? Aha! Some scribbled figures and formulas below the drawing. I realized grimly that one of them involved a law of thermodynamics. The next sheet to interest me was equally incomprehensible. It was covered with excerpts from something called the *Dhammapada*. The handwriting was nearly impossible to read. And yet we in New York continue to shell out all that tax money for the schools! Some example these so-called graduates offered. What in the world was the *Dhammapada*? Hernandez's theory was becoming increasingly plausible. It seemed likely that this strange book was something like the *Kama Sūtra*, an exhaustive description of hundreds upon hundreds of positions for lovemaking. Barely keeping my disgust in check, I scanned the sheet, looking for tell-tale phrases. Perhaps it was all in code. But the writing was difficult enough. I managed to distinguish one quotation with a fair degree of confidence: "For never does hatred cease by hatred here below: hatred ceases by non-hatred; this is an eternal law." Law, did it say? There were other laws, mister, including laws against fraud and theft. And I was determined to see the ingenious Abel

brought to justice. There could be little doubt now. I held in my hand a recent electric bill, with the amount due circled twice in red. So he was enjoying himself at our expense, was he?

Time had passed swiftly, too swiftly. I remembered to check my watch, and saw that twenty-five minutes had elapsed. I suspected that Mrs. Arlene Davis was not sophisticated enough to keep Abel for more than the agreed-upon time. No doubt even now she was counting the minutes and waiting to dismiss him. In any event, I had to leave at once. It was still too early to confront Mr. S. Abel. That could wait until I had managed to study this baffling room in more detail. I was more and more confused about the exact nature of the fraud. There seemed to be a case of Mason jars in one corner of the room. Were these jars connected in some way to the mysterious screens? For now, however, escape without a trace. I spread the sheets of paper over the table to recreate the disorder in which I had found them.

The next morning, as I sat in my office sipping my first cup of tea, I received an excited call from Mrs. Morgan. It took me a few minutes to calm her down and begin to make sense of her babbling. "Murder? Who? Where? In the back yard? What, then? . . . You saw him bury a coffin? What does Mr. Chalmers say?" Finally, I managed to piece together the story: Mrs. Davis, Mrs. Morgan, and Vince Chalmers were meeting at the latter's house to discuss their proposed surveillance of the suspect. It was about ten o'clock at night. Mrs. Morgan happened to glance out the window and saw a shadowy figure behind Abel's house. He appeared to be digging a hole. By majority vote, Chalmers was sent to investigate. According to his imperfect testimony, Abel was burying a dark box, the size of a small coffin. "A midget's coffin," Mrs. Morgan had volunteered. "A real pervert, this Mr. Abel, believe me."

"Mrs. Morgan, listen to me. Leave the box alone. I repeat, leave it alone. When necessary, we'll dig it up officially, properly. Until then, go about your own business. Got that? Have a nice day. . . . No, I don't normally carry a gun. Yes, so you said . . . your husband's old rifle. Yes, thank you very much. No. No, please keep Luvums away from the burial site. Yes, I understand. . . . Have a nice day."

Something was up, apparently. Whatever was in the box—coffin or otherwise—would probably be valuable evidence; but this was not a job for amateurs. I just had to hope that the more temperate neighbors could persuade Mrs. Morgan to rest peacefully. In the meantime, however, I had to act. When Mr. S. Abel returned from

work that evening, I would be ready for him, there to witness his crime. My camera and tape recorder would no doubt prove handy, not to mention the kit I had used the evening before.

The denouement came suddenly. In part, I must recreate what happened, based upon my study of the evidence that survived. I realize that the story I have to tell will be greeted with incredulity and skepticism by many of you, but I will provide the best account possible of that tragic evening.

I was already inside Abel's house when I caught sight of the small posse assembling on Mrs. Morgan's lawn. My heart fell. Chalmers carried a shovel and a pick. It was already twilight. The pale grass of the neighborhood lawns was turning grey. A few lights had switched on inside the uniform homes, lights that my company had made possible. But this evening, that was little consolation. Desperately, trying to stop the neighbors, I rapped on the window, but they did not hear, so engrossed were they in their bold preparations. Even from across the street, I could see Mrs. Morgan's gleaming eye. I was about to dash out of Abel's front door and give them a stern admonition when the man in question turned the corner and drew near. He was apparently whistling. He swung a tidy briefcase in one hand as he strode along. Perhaps his heavy brown wingtips clicked on the ashen sidewalk. From my perspective, I could see the three neighbors hurry furtively out of his sight. Abel suspected nothing. Remembering my own position, however, I let the drapes fall into place and searched the living room for the best refuge.

"Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer, do," sang Mr. S. Abel as he entered the house. "I'm half crazy, all for the love of you. . . ."

The pretense continues, I thought grimly, peeking around the side of the armchair. As quiet as a shadow, I watched him toss his briefcase onto a chair in the front hall, drop his beige raincoat over the back of same, and vanish into the kitchen. He returned moments later with a frosted mug almost overflowing with golden beer. How much did it cost you to chill that, Mr. Abel? How utterly selfish of you, forcing us to pass the cost onto the less fortunate and less unscrupulous! I was tempted to shove the mug into his insipid face and shout my accusations right then and there. But I knew I had work to do, further evidence to collect; personal animosity had no place here. Crouched behind the armchair, I was prepared to wait, hours if need be, to wait and wait for the incriminating act.

Fortunately for my joints, it did not take that long. Having

quaffed his brew and begun another ditty from the Gay Nineties, Abel fetched his copy of the *Times* and walked in the direction of the basement door. I peered after him cautiously. Yes, there was the clink of keys in locks, the squeak of the door opening. He was returning, no doubt, to the scene of the crime. My palms were damp. As soon as I heard him close the door behind him and lock it methodically from the other side, I jumped up from my hiding place. Now, what were those meddlers up to? I spared a few valuable seconds to peek out the window, but I could not see them. The street appeared calm. The sky had deepened in color. As long as Chalmers did not begin to dig . . .

Catlike, I moved to the door to the basement. When I placed my ear against the panel, I could barely detect a new noise beyond. It had to be remarkably loud for me to catch it through the wood and the thick overlay of cork. What was it? Shouts? Shrieks? Still too muffled. But who was down there with him? Had there been somebody else the time I investigated? A chill ran down my spine. Was I prepared to press on? Should I get reinforcements from headquarters? As I stood there, ear still pressed to the door, I tried to distinguish the elements of the uproar. No, it had to be voices alone, or a single voice. But whose? It could not be Abel screaming, not that calm, collected man of the placid demeanor, the paragon of niceness. Criminal, perhaps—but not a raving lunatic.

Words? Was that? . . . I could not believe it. Without the cork shield, the neighborhood would have been shocked. *I* was shocked. I caught—I thought I caught—a long and rather inventive obscenity. It seemed incumbent upon me to proceed.

After I had quietly unlocked the last lock, I hesitated, my gloved fingers on the handle. What would I find? I opened the door a slit, and at once the noise rushed out like a thunderclap, but this thunder did not abate. There was a madman down there, shrieking at the top of his lungs, letting loose a foul torrent of words or dumb sounds of fearful rage.

HAAH! HHUNH! GODDAMNTHEWHOLEDAMNWORLDTO-HELL!

HELL!HELL!HELL!

UNHGH! AIEE! HRRR!

SMASHYOURFACEINTOAPULP!!!

AIEYAH! FFLRWG!

GODDAMNTAXESGODDAMNSUBWAY!!

SHRAAGK! FTHZSH! MERDE! PUCE! PUCE! PUCE!

ABOMINATION UPON ABOMINATION! SHNARGH!

HAAIEE! KILL! STRXFRLWYASTRZEMSKIKOHLRABI-KILL!!!

HHUHH! SIXTH PLACE!! HAAIEE! DAGNABDADBURN-DANGDURN!

HAAIEE!

Was Abel torturing him? Perhaps there was something involved beyond mere energy fraud. Perhaps the police should handle this. What would happen if Chalmers and crew stumbled upon this repulsive scene? Whoever it was sounded violent. I was transfixed halfway down the stairs, still out of sight, my own vision blocked by the exposed beams. Only later did I realize that I had completely forgotten about my camera and tape recorder. The vile screaming went on unchecked, horrible, revolting, nauseating, too gross for fuller description, raw hatred, the human voice nearly unrecognizable, lapsing momentarily into a sputter. My mind made up, I continued my descent, making no effort to quiet my movements. I was quite prepared to exceed my powers as special investigator, quite prepared to make a citizen's arrest if absolutely necessary. But I was not at all prepared for the sight that greeted me in the middle of the room.

"Abel!"

He was perched on the stool, newspaper in his lap, bending forward so that his crimson, contorted face was only inches away from the two metal screens. As he shrieked and foamed and raved, he managed somehow to keep his balance. My gaze moved numbly to the screens themselves, now tinged red, glowing—my God, can it be?—with the fury of his voice, capturing the heat, transforming it through the magic of science. As my eyes followed the wires that led to the container of water, a vague reluctant understanding was forming in my mind. No, understanding is too strong. The water seethed, now loathsomely dark, as if soiled by the venom he expressed: A side product? What was the next step? He was actually *converting hatred into energy*, somehow, somehow, my mind reeled. The Mason jars? To bottle it, to preserve the terrible water—or to get rid of it? Abel continued to shriek and rant, too obsessed to pay any attention to me. The whole peculiar system pulsed, working with mysterious fervor. All this, all this, damnable but marvelous, to cheat us of a few miserable dollars each month? From beaker to beaker to cell to generator to . . . But was the water harmful? An excess of energy? Or a volatile, dangerous waste product to be carefully disposed of? My God, was that what he buried in the back yard? What if Chalmers? . . . Merciful Lord!



There was no time to lose. Even now, Chalmers could have unearthed the coffin, one of who-knows how many, filled with who knows how many jars, and be swinging his pick above his head. Downward, down, smashing . . . There could be dozens of the foul things inside! I had to stop him. But first:

"Abel! Abel! Stop! You're in danger!"

**HHUHNH!! AAHIEE!! GRINDYOUREARLOBESINTOMUSH!!  
HRAHRR!! DOWNTENPOINTSATCLOSING!! GRWXGRH!!  
MASSACREBLOODBATHSLAUGHTERSHAMBLES!!**

I could wait no longer. With a half-formed prayer running through my head, I dashed up the stairs and down the corridor to the back door. It was as I fumbled with the safety chain that the first explosion occurred outside. The shock sent me sprawling. Before I could get to my feet, the second explosion came, louder and more forceful. The whole house rocked. I thought I heard cries. Fumes, dust, my tongue coated, hard to swallow, the floor shuddering, ringing, ringing, my ears would not stop. Where was Abel? I tried to roll down the corridor into the living room. Two feet, three. Dragging myself. The lights fragmenting. What if the explosions outside triggered off more in the basement? What if . . . Abruptly, the next explosion came; closer; the ceiling cracked over my head; I seemed to be sliding somewhere into darkness; I heard the souls of the damned. Was that blood? The lights . . . vanishing . . .

They found me unconscious among the remains of the living room. Apparently, the plush cushions from Abel's sofa had fallen upon me and in part protected me from the full impact of the destruction. My clothes were in tatters; my hair smelled from being singed. Most of the house was gone. There was no trace of Abel, no trace of the basement and his awful invention, only a vast hole filled with rubble. The authorities, after conscientiously sifting the ashes on the blackened lawn, made an attempt to distinguish the three neighbors. I had my doubts. And where was Luvums? I vaguely recall being taken by stretcher into the ambulance and glimpsing the pale identical faces of the local residents, come to take in the disaster. "But he was such a nice guy."

My official report, needless to say, was much more reserved than this.

# The Apportings

by Augusta Hancock

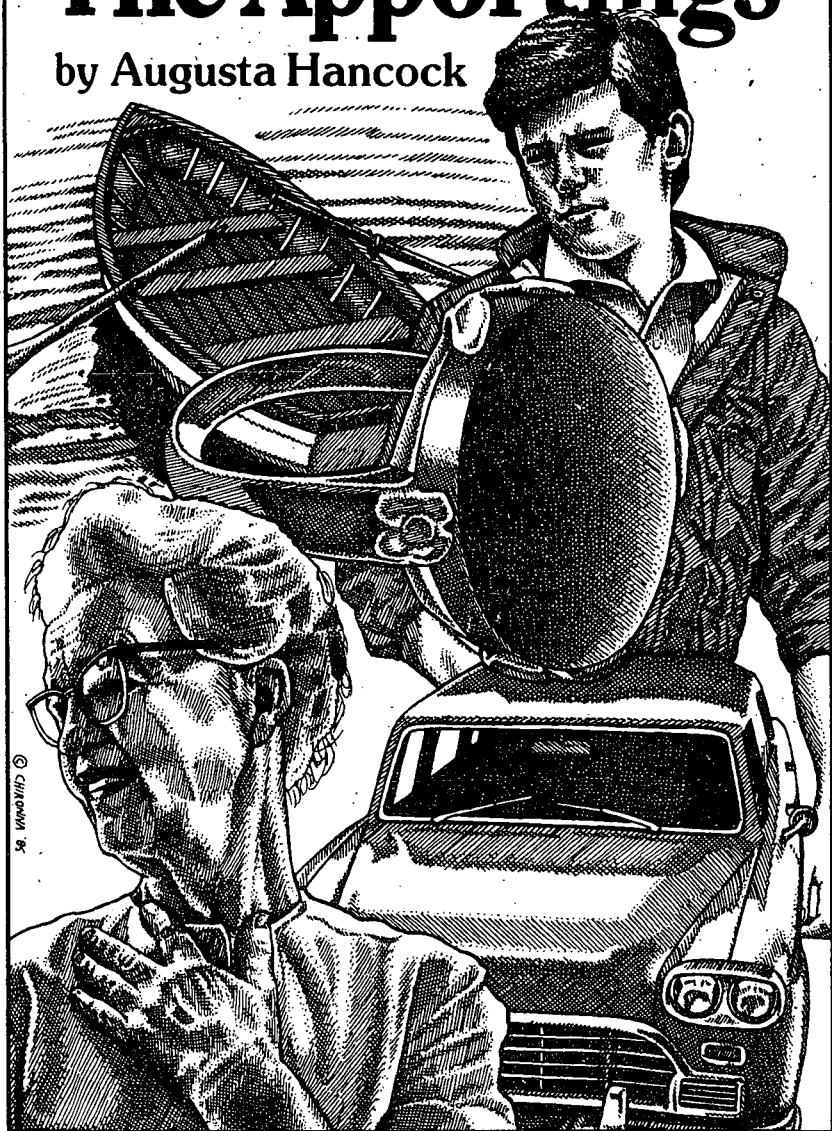


Illustration by Ronald Chironna

“Wimbie? This is Tom Lawson. I’m calling to ask if you’re coming down here any time soon?”

Wimbledon Jones was glad to hear Tom Lawson’s voice. Tom was one of his closest friends and the police chief in the coastal town where Wimbie went in the summer, but a call from Tom surely meant an unpeaceful vacation. “We’ll be there on the twentieth, God willing. End of the week.”

“When you get down, I’d kind of like to talk to you.”

“You know I’ll come to see you, anyway. What’s bothering you, Tom? You’re not supposed to have any crime in that quiet, peaceful place, at one with nature and all that.”

“That may be so, but supposed to or not, we’ve got it from time to time, as you know. There’s something going on now that doesn’t seem to be crime, but I can’t account for it.”

Sitting in Tom’s office a few days later, Wimbie looked out the window at the harbor, the blue water, and the white boats rocking a little at their moorings.

“I just ran into Evan Kingsley,” Wimbie said. “He says they’ve got the Bryson boy there this summer. Has that caused any problems?” He studied

Tom’s lean, blue-eyed face, relieved to see that he didn’t look any different. It seemed to Wimbie that everybody was looking older and seedier recently, but Tom was as trim and keen as ever.

“There’ve been a couple of press people around. I guess that’s been kind of hard on the Kingsleys, but it hasn’t given me any trouble. The boy seems nice enough. Gossip is that the parents are getting a divorce, so he’s been sent down here to keep him out of it. People gawk at him, but I guess he’s used to it. He’s a quiet kid, doesn’t seem too spoiled. He mixes with the local people. Especially the girls.”

“So, what is bothering you?”

Tom sighed and rubbed his chin. “Things are getting misplaced.”

“Misplaced?”

“Yep. Not exactly stolen. Just moved around. The first thing was a ring. Jennie Tennant took it off in the ladies’ room at the Clamdigger. She’s the one that has that vegetable stand on the Burnt Cove road. Nice girl. Married to Hank Tennant, who works at Moody’s Service Station. Well, Jennie went back to the Clamdigger the next day, but the ring was gone. Nobody’d seen it. The Simpsons were that upset that it disappeared in their restaurant, but

Jennie said it was her fault for being careless. She didn't report the theft to me, but everybody was talking about it because, on the second day, the ring turned up in her mailbox. Fell out when she took out the mail.

"The next thing was Amos Thacher's dinghy that turned up way over on Milo Easton's point. Just sitting there, no harm done. No earthly or waterly way it could have got there by itself.

"Then last week, Gene White's car that was in front of his house turned up behind the church. At first, it was just things. But last night Mabel Dowd disappeared. So far, she hasn't turned up anywhere else. She was in her house last evening when Martha Withers took some cookies to her. This morning Minnie Greenleaf went over and the house was empty. Everything neat as a pin, but no Mabel."

"Couldn't she just have gone out somewhere?"

"Mabel doesn't get out unless somebody takes her. Got heart trouble. Doesn't walk; doesn't drive, doesn't have a car. And she's got pretty vague in her old age. She oughtn't to live alone. Now, she hasn't come home, and nobody's reported her in any other place. I kept telling Mabel she should lock her door,

but she's never locked a door in her life, and I guess she's too old to start now. I thought she might have a robbery one day, but it didn't occur to me that anybody'd steal *her*." Tom shook his head.

He stood up and moved over to the window, stretching his long legs. "There was a woman here a few years back who talked about 'apporting'—things getting mysteriously moved from one place to another without any human intervention. Something like that's happening now, but I've got a sneaking suspicion there's human intervention."

"Have you got any mystics around this summer who might be practicing?"

"Not as I know of."

The phone rang and Tom's deputy, Jeb Stinton, answered it. "Yep, I'll tell him. He's right here. Thank you very much." Jeb turned to Tom. "That was Martha Withers. Jim Quimby was just in the post office and said he'd seen Mabel Dowd down at the end of Water Street. He'd heard you were looking for her."

Tom and Wimbie got into the police car. Wimbie had mixed feelings about riding in the car, with its radio, its blue flashing light (not flashing now, but there), its siren (silent now, but there). He didn't like its aggressiveness, its power; but he

enjoyed being in on what Tom was working on, and now Tom was driving quietly along Water Street.

"There's the Bryson boy, coming out of the drugstore," said Tom, nodding toward a handsome, thin young man, who moved with a certain self-consciousness but looked otherwise pretty normal. As the boy glanced at the police car, Wimbie noticed intelligent dark eyes, but the boy quickly turned away, as if he, too, didn't like the looks of the car. "I think he favors his mother," said Tom.

"I didn't know you knew about actresses. I'm always surprised at the things you know about."

Tom grinned. "City people always think they're the only ones who know anything. I saw her in *Wings Above the Sands*. She was beautiful. That was a while back."

"She's probably still in her thirties. I guess it's surprising that marriage lasted as long as it did."

"Yep. The boy must be sixteen or seventeen. There's Jim Quimby." Wimbie glanced at the sandy-haired man who was just opening the door of a parked car. "He's got to go up to Bangor for a hernia operation. It's going to be kind of hard on him not to be able to haul his traps just when everybody's wanting lots of lobster."

At the far end of Water Street, Tom eased the car to the curb, got out, and approached a bent woman with wispy white hair. She looked up.

"Morning, Tom. How're you?"

"Mabel, I've been looking all over for you. Where on earth have you been?"

"I haven't been anywhere, Tom."

"Who brought you to the store?" She seemed about to go into Vic's Market. "You live at the other end of town."

Mabel looked vague. "Well, I guess Janet did."

"Janet's gone to Bangor."

Mabel looked more puzzled. "Well, I got here somehow, didn't I?"

"Where were you this morning?"

"I wasn't anywhere this morning. Why are you asking anyway, Tom? What's the matter with you? I haven't done anything I shouldn't."

Tom sighed. He hadn't been able to ask Amos's dinghy how it had got where it was, and he hadn't expected any explanation from Gene White's Oldsmobile. But now he had a real living, talking human being, and she couldn't give him an answer, either. "Do you want to get anything in the store, Mabel, or do you want me to take you home?"

"Well, I guess you can take

me home, thank you very much."

Wimbie had got out of the car and stood listening. He had a remarkably unobtrusive presence, and Mabel Dowd had not seemed to notice him. Now they all got into the police car. "How're you feeling, Mrs. Dowd?" Wimbie asked.

"Never felt better in my life. Nothing like a good night's sleep to make you feel perky."

"It certainly is a beautiful day."

"Yep. I'm going to go out and work in my garden this morning."

"Mabel," Tom said, "it's nearly supertime."

"Now, where'd this day go? I must be getting old and forgetty. But I feel better than I've felt in a long time. I feel real spry."

"Here we are," said Tom. "I'll see you get in all right."

When he got back to the car, he turned to Wimbie.

"Drugged?" Wimbie asked.

"Must have been. I'll ask Doc Cameron to drop in on her. But what is this all about, Wimbie? Each time it's something a little bigger or a little more alive."

**W**imbie was sitting on his porch watching a lobster boat pick its way across the bay, stopping now and then at a bright little buoy. His wife,

Sarah, was working at the far side of the lawn, leaning over to put fertilizer around the peonies. She looked like a teenager. Inside him, a large breakfast lay comfortably. He felt very relaxed.

He was startled by a knock at the front door. Hardly anyone ever knocked at the door, certainly not the front door. He hauled himself out of the chair reluctantly. Through the glass of the door he saw Evan Kingsley. Evan had a classically handsome face—he always made Wimbie feel grubby. Evan could be out in a sailboat in gale wind and every iron-gray hair would be in place. He dressed as simply as anyone else around here, but he could go to a wedding in those clothes and fit in perfectly.

"Good morning, Wimbie. I hate to disturb you. I know you're on vacation, but I've got a problem." Wimbie had known that the moment he'd seen Evan at the door. "I think, at this stage, that it would be better to discuss it with you than with Tom."

Wimbie frowned. He didn't ply his trade here. He'd never done anything here except to act as Tom's sidekick.

Evan didn't give Wimbie a chance to respond. "I realize that's difficult for you, but I'd rather not bring Tom in offi-

cially. Not yet, at least."

Meaning that I can bring him in unofficially, Wimbie thought—an even worse kettle of haddock. Wimbie shook his head sadly and motioned Evan to come in and sit down, while Evan assured him that he would be paid for his services. What was he supposed to do—offer Tom a cut?

"As you know—I suppose everybody knows—the Bryson boy has been staying with us this summer. I think I told you he's in school with my son, King. Rod Bryson's a nice kid, but, with an entrepreneur father and a movie-actress mother, he's not had an exactly normal upbringing. I don't suppose he's ever seen much of his parents. They've provided very well for him, and I'm sure they love him, but they've not been *there*. I think he's at an age when he particularly needs them. Most kids his age rebel against their parents, but Rod, never having had them, probably swings the other way. He's not your usual teenager, in any case. But that's not the issue of the moment.

"This morning he wasn't in the house. The bed hadn't been slept in. He and King took the car to go to the movies last night—King's just got his license. Rod said he wanted to walk home. It's a long walk, and it was foggy last night, but

King said okay and came home alone. I heard the car and the back door, thought the boys were safely home, and went to sleep. It was bad judgment on King's part to let the boy go off by himself, but it hardly seems that he could have been kidnapped. He has wandered off alone a couple of times, but never at night, certainly never for the whole night. I've talked to the young people Rod knows. No one has seen him. I thought perhaps he wanted to see a girl. He seems to like girls, particularly the Greenleaf girl, I think. I talked to her this morning. She's been making a costume for the Fourth of July parade, and she was at home all evening working on it. Rod had told her he might stop by on his way home from the movies. But he didn't. That made me decide to come to you. I don't want to be an alarmist. This seems to be such a safe place, I can't imagine anything happening to him. I suppose he could have got hit by a car in the fog—but where is he? I've been by the hospital. I've driven along the road. I'm sure there's some logical teenage explanation. But the boy is known to be the son of wealthy and prominent people, and I'm responsible for him. I thought I'd best come to you. I can't think of anything more to do myself."



"Nothing unusual's happened in the last few days? No upsetting letter from home?"

Evan smiled wryly. "His mother's on location in Mexico, and his father's in Timbuctu—literally. There's not much communication."

"No one hanging around the house? No odd telephone calls? No change of mood?"

"I can't think of anything that hasn't been normal."

"I'll see what I can do, but you realize this is an oddball situation for me."

"I know that, but I'd be grateful for your help."

After Evan had left, Wimbie called to Sarah, then got into the car and drove the short distance into town. He parked on Water Street and walked toward the drugstore. The only time he'd seen Rod Bryson was when he was coming out of the drugstore, so he might as well start there. As he was about to put his foot up on the wooden step, the screen door opened, and Tom Lawson stepped out. He looked at Wimbie and grinned.

"Morning, Wimbie. I guess you've heard the Bryson boy is missing. Nobody's told me officially, but the kids are talking about it." He looked serious. "Do you suppose it's another misplaced person or something worse? I can't help wondering."

"I hope he's just misplaced. But a kid like that is very apt to have been kidnapped."

"If it's a kidnapping, somebody will ask for some money. That is, I guess they will. There's never been a kidnapping around here, so I don't rightly know how it works. Wimbie, do you think these things are all tied together?"

"Could be. I've been thinking about that ring. It was taken by someone who knew where to return it. Unless, of course, there was another person involved."

"That ring was a birthday present from her family, had her initials in it and the date they gave it to her."

"So anybody who knew the local people pretty well would have seen her in the Clamdigger and figured out whose ring it was."

Tom nodded, then glanced back at the drugstore. "Rod Bryson only bought some candy bars in there, but you might want to talk to Amy Greenleaf at the counter."

"She said Rod didn't show up last night, but it's possible that she was shy about telling Evan what really happened."

"Well, I'd best get back to the office. Let me know if you need any help, official or otherwise." Tom grinned. Wimbie didn't bother to ask how Tom knew

he'd been retained by Evan. Tom just knew things.

Wimbie opened the door and went into the drugstore. Amy Greenleaf was a fragile-looking, tiny girl with enormous blue eyes and long, pale hair. She stood behind a counter display of souvenir calendars—gulls, sea, rocks, and light-houses. She was firm about Rod's not having appeared. She had been expecting him. Her eyes got bigger with welling tears because he hadn't come. Wimbie left before the flood began.

He drove out to the Kingsleys' "cottage." Young King was practicing golf strokes on the lawn at the edge of the rocks that staggered down to the sea.

"Tell me everything you can think of," Wimbie said.

But he didn't find out much more than he'd learned from the boy's father, except that Rod was very smart in school when he wanted to be. Sometimes he seemed smarter than the teachers, but sometimes he was out of it, just didn't seem to care. "Like, you know, he'll just sit staring out the window."

Wimbie left the house thinking about that, but also thinking of the other "apportings." He decided he'd go to the Clam-digger for lunch.

It was a nice-looking restaurant, with maple furniture and

chintz curtains. He ordered a lobster and talked to Agatha Simpson, who was motherly and efficient without making a fuss about either virtue. She liked Wimbie because he liked her food, and she knew he was fussy about food.

"Do you happen to remember if the Bryson boy was in here the night Jennie Tennant's ring disappeared?" he asked her.

"Yes, that boy was in here that evening. I couldn't help thinking over everyone I knew who'd been in here the night that ring disappeared. Of course, there were a lot of people we didn't know—people passing through or summer people who don't come here very often."

"Do you remember where he was sitting?"

"He was with the Kingsleys, and they were at the table over there in the corner."

Wimbie looked at the table. "Do you remember which chair he was sitting in?"

"He was in that chair right there. I couldn't help looking at him. He's a handsome boy, he looks like his mother."

The chair faced the little corridor that led to the restrooms. The boy could easily have seen anyone going or coming. "You don't happen to remember if he went to the restroom, do you?"

"I can't say for sure. I was seating people and checking in

the kitchen. But I didn't see him go down there."

"Who else was here that night that you knew?"

"Well, let's see. Gene White was here with his son and daughter-in-law. It was his birthday, his fiftieth, and they brought him over for a special treat. We had a birthday cake for him. Gene's been kind of sad since his wife died. He got a little high, I guess, because the kids bought him some champagne. He doesn't usually drink anything, but it was a special occasion."

"Anyone else?"

"Amos Thacher and his wife were here with some relatives from Portland. Amos and Mary don't come here very often, but they wanted to take their relatives somewhere nice. Amos and Gene are kind of rivals in their lobstering. Amos said something joking to Gene about the champagne and his birthday, and Gene seemed kind of annoyed, but it wasn't anything serious. Let's see, that's about all I know. But there were quite a lot of people that night."

"Mabel Dowd wasn't here, was she?"

"No, indeed. I don't guess she gets out very much. I don't think she's ever been in here."

Agatha went to wait on someone else, and Wimbie looked

around. Jennie Tennant had gone to the ladies' room. Gene White probably went to the men's room, if he'd been drinking champagne. Rod Bryson could see down that corridor. What about Amos Thacher? Had he gone down there? Amos, who didn't seem to spend a lot of time talking to people—he was something of a recluse, a bit of an eccentric—had a particularly heavy Maine accent. If Wimbie were to talk to Amos, he wasn't sure he could understand him. But he could talk to Gene White. Maybe Gene White knew more than he'd volunteered to talk about. Of course, nobody'd really asked him anything.

Wimbie was leaning on the pilings, looking out across the water, when Gene White came up in his dinghy. Wimbie watched him work. Gene was overweight, probably had been most of his life, but a lot of his heft was muscle. Wimbie studied the neat, economical movements of the clumsy-looking man. Pulling lobster traps did a lot for coordination. Gene stepped up on the dock; he was a short man.

Wimbie nodded to a dinghy tied on the other side of the dock. "That's the disappearing dinghy?"

"Yep, I guess it is."

"I hear you and Amos had a little argument just before it disappeared."

"We sometimes have some disagreements. I guess we have had all our lives. We're kind of cousins, Amos and me. Neither one of us had a brother, so we kind of use each other to take things out on. He and Jim Quimby and I all grew up together and started lobstering about the same time. We ride each other quite a bit."

"You didn't disagree so much that you'd want to move his dinghy just to make him mad?"

"I didn't take Amos's dinghy. That's one thing I didn't take."

Something in the way he said this made Wimbie ask a question he hadn't known he was going to ask. "What about Jennie Tennant's ring?"

A funny look crossed Gene's round face. He looked blubbery. He spluttered. Then he heaved a big sigh. "That's something that's sure been worrying me. I did take that ring. I don't know how you figured that out, but I own up to it. I was going to the men's room. You have to go past the ladies' room to get there. The door of the ladies' was open, and the light was on. I saw that ring on the glass shelf above the wash basin right by the door. It looked real pretty, and I guess I'd had a lot of

champagne. I just reached out and took it. I don't know why I did that. I felt real bad about it afterwards. Somehow, I guess it made me think of Ellie. Afterwards I thought, 'What on earth do I want with that? So I went by Jennie's real early in the morning and put it in the mailbox. I'd figured out it was hers. I didn't want to tell I'd taken it. I just wanted to give it back. Jennie's a nice girl, and she married a nice boy. I didn't mean them no harm. I never stole anything before in all my life.' Gene released a big sigh and looked down at the water through the cracks in the dock.

"Well, there's no harm done there. Tell me, the night of your birthday, the Bryson boy was also in the restaurant. Did he possibly see you take the ring?"

"I don't rightly remember. I do recall he and the Kingsleys were there."

"He could have seen Jennie go into the ladies', and then seen you, and figured out what had happened when he heard the ring was missing. Or he could have gone to the men's room and seen the ring lying on the shelf in the ladies' room. Then he could have seen you go down that corridor and reach in for the ring."

"That's possible, but what's it mean?"

"I don't know."

“**R**od’s got a funny sense of humor,” King Kingsley said, plucking at the strings of his tennis racket as he sat on the top step of his family’s front porch. Wimbie, sitting on the edge of a chair above him, thought that King probably hadn’t quite got used to the idea of girls yet. “I don’t always get what he thinks is funny,” King went on. “Like he was laughing because he said Gene White stole his own car.”

“Why did he think Gene did that? Why did he think it was funny?”

“I don’t know. He says a lot of things without really explaining them.”

“Did he know that Jennie Tennant’s ring had disappeared and been returned?”

“Yes. He’d heard about it somewhere. He listens a lot. Like, you know, he’s always telling me about something he heard somebody say. He kind of likes to think of things as stories.”

“The night Amos Thacher’s dinghy disappeared, what were you and Rod doing?”

“It did seem kind of funny when I heard that dinghy had disappeared. We’d been to the movies that night, and then we walked around town, like along the water and over to the cove on the other side. Rod’s inter-

ested in all the boats. Like he knows whose boat is whose. I’m into sailboats, you know, but I don’t care anything about the fishing boats. Rod said something about two dinghies tied up alongside each other, saying that one belonged to Gene White and one to Amos Thacher, and that the guys were always fighting each other, but the dinghies looked real peaceful together.”

“And then?”

“And then we walked back to the car and drove home.”

“Could he have gone back to town?”

“I suppose he could have. He gets kind of restless sometimes. Like, he likes to wander around.”

Gene White was washing up his supper dishes when Wimbie arrived at the kitchen door. Wimbie watched him a moment, thinking that he didn’t seem as coordinated as he had with the dinghy. Maybe it was just because he wasn’t used to doing dishes.

“I was wondering about your car disappearing and reappearing behind the church,” Wimbie said.

“Yep. Damnedest thing.” Gene looked away. A cup slipped from his towel into the drying rack.

“There’s a rumor that you moved it yourself.”

Gene put the towel down abruptly and rubbed his hand over his rubbery face.

"At first, people thought I did something with Amos's dinghy. Then, when it was found, people commenced talking about things disappearing and showing up again. People still thought I might have taken that dinghy, though. And I guess I felt kind of guilty about that ring. I thought if I moved my own car, then people would think it was just another funny thing and I wasn't the one who'd taken Amos's dinghy. 'Cause I wasn't. Please don't tell Amos I stole my own car. He'd never let me live it down. Does sound kind of crazy, doesn't it? It seemed like a good idea at the time. I guess I don't think so good without Ellie."

"Why didn't you tell me about this before?"

"I told you about the stealing. This wasn't stealing. This was my own car."

"I'm not interested in stealing or not stealing. I'm interested in finding the Bryson boy."

"I don't see what that has to do with it."

"It may have a lot to do with it. Did it occur to you that the Bryson boy might have moved the dinghy?"

"The Bryson boy? Why on earth would he want to do a

thing like that?"

"It looks as if the two of you are playing some kind of disappearing game. First one of you makes a move and then the other."

Gene stared at him openmouthed. "You mean, if he'd seen me take the ring, he could have taken Amos's dinghy just for a joke because it would look as if I'd done it?"

"Something like that."

"I swear I don't know anything about how that boy disappeared or where he is."

"You didn't happen to move Mabel Dowd, did you?"

"Mabel? How could I move Mabel?"

"You have a car, don't you?"

Wimbie was getting tired of the trip back and forth to the Kingsleys'. He'd have to start thinking of all the right questions at one visit. Once more he drove through town, along Water Street. Tom was just coming out of his office. He hailed Wimbie. Wimbie was stopping anyway. He pulled over and got out of the car.

"I've been wondering about that stretch of shore between town and the Kingsleys'," Wimbie began.

"Yep, I figured you might be," Tom replied. "Nice afternoon, a lot of people out on those rocks today. Nobody saw

anything they wouldn't want to see. I even took a sort of unofficial stroll along there myself."

Wimbie smiled. "Thanks, Tom."

Tom grinned at him. "I've been doing a little library research, too, while you've been out running around."

Wimbie looked at him blankly.

"Rod's grandfather was a tugboat captain. I found that in a book of incidental information about movie stars." His attention diverted, Tom looked down the street. Wimbie followed his gaze and saw Mabel Dowd. "At least this time Janet brought her," said Tom. "There's her car. I tried to question Mabel again about where she'd been the other day, but now she doesn't even remember we gave her a ride home." The two men drifted toward her.

"I certainly am sorry to hear that Bryson boy went away," Mabel said. "He was a nice young man."

Tom was surprised. "I didn't know you knew him, Mabel."

"Of course I knew him. I certainly hope he comes back."

"Did you see much of him, Mabel?"

"Well, I guess not. I guess just that one time."

"What one time was that, Mabel?"

"Well, I guess I don't rightly

remember. But there was one time I saw him and we talked a long time. He told me he'd never had a grandmother and I would make a nice grandmother. I guess I gave him a cup of tea. Maybe he took me to the store. You know, I'm getting so I don't remember things as well as I once did." She shook her head and wandered off down the street.

"The kids tell me that this isn't the first time the boy's taken off," Tom said, "only the first time he's vanished without a trace."

"Somebody ought to talk to Amos Thacher," Wimbie said. "I've thought about it, but I can't understand a word Amos says. He's out there all day with the lobsters and the gulls. I bet they can understand him, but I sure can't."

"I have a little trouble with him myself," Tom replied. "You don't get much out of Amos, anyway. When I asked him about his dinghy, it was mostly 'yep' and 'nope.' He does keep to himself and the lobsters. But I'm getting kind of worried. This is longer than most of the other disappearings."

"I'm getting worried, too."

**T**he Kingsleys were sitting on what was called here their "piazza," having a drink. For all his



aplomb, Evan looked upset. So did Ellen Kingsley, a quiet woman with a classic profile.

There had been no ransom demand.

"I need to talk to King once more," Wimbie said. "I hope this is the last time."

King came out on the porch, pulling a sweater over his head.

"What were you and Rod doing the day Mabel Dowd disappeared?"

"That was the morning I got up and found a note that Rod had left, saying he was going out on one of the boats. He came back in the late afternoon. He said he'd been lobstering."

"Do you know who he went out with?"

"He didn't say."

"I think I'm putting something together," Wimbie said to Evan, "but I'm still not sure what it is. Everything seems to fit, but I don't know what it adds up to."

Wimbie spent the rest of the evening calling on every lobsterman he knew about. None of them had taken the boy out, or knew of anyone who had.

He went home, where Sarah, in a bright red fuzzy sweater, gave him a strong scotch, hot thick soup, cold chicken, and homemade bread. He slept badly, with some exhausting dream about floating around in a tossing dinghy, trying to get

a ring off a lobster.

In the morning he went to see Tom.

"Either the kid did it himself or something real bad's happened to him. But what? Nobody's asked for money, nobody's reported anything. So what did he do himself? And why? Providing he's still alive, that is. A spoiled, theatrical kid, interested in girls—and boats. Boats. Lobster boats. King says Rod is interested in lobster boats. You said his grandfather was a tugboat captain—"

"It occurs to me," Tom said, "that one of those boats is sitting out there not being used. Jim Quimby's up to Bangor, having an operation. But I don't see how the boy could have got out to the boat himself. Dinghy's ashore. Somebody might have taken him out, of course. Another thing. Jim lives alone, and I don't guess anybody's checked his house. You might do that first. Maybe I'd better give you a police escort, if you're going to be trespassing. We don't have a warrant, but we can do some heavy looking around."

Wimbie got into his car; Tom followed in the police car. They started driving slowly along Water Street. A windjammer stood regally at the dock, dominating the harbor view. People from the windjammer cruise

flooded the town, walking down the middle of the street or peering in shop windows.

Among them, Wimbie suddenly glimpsed Rod Bryson.

He braked so hard that Tom, behind him, nearly rammed him with the cruiser. Wimbie pulled his car in the general direction of the curb, leapt out, and ran after the boy, who was about to disappear into the throng. Good Lord, had he been on the windjammer? Wimbie shoved through the crowd and put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Where on earth have you been, Rod? A lot of people have been very worried about you."

"I haven't been anywhere. You're the detective, aren't you? Did my mother employ you? Is she here?"

"Look, you've been away from the Kingsleys' house for two nights. You've got to have been somewhere. No, your mother's not here. Did you do this to get her attention?"

"I must have just got misplaced." The boy looked bland-faced, a little spacey.

"Come on. I'll give you a ride back to the Kingsleys'."

Rod got into the car. Wimbie shook his head and shrugged as he looked back at Tom, who stayed put. In the car, the boy was silent, turned away from Wimbie, looking out at the

tourists, who stared back, curious about what was going on, wondering if they'd seen an arrest.

"What will you say to the Kingsleys? You've had them pretty upset."

"I'll say I was apported."

"Would you satisfy my personal curiosity as to where you got apported to?"

The boy was silent.

"You're a smart kid. You figured out who took that ring. You figured out who moved that car. I guess you've got some of your father's brains as well as your mother's sense of theater."

No response.

"You had that pretty little girl worried about you, too."

"She was getting too serious."

So, Wimbie thought, Rod was more interested in his mother than in girls. Girls were only what he was supposed to like, part of the image he was supposed to live up to.

Evan Kingsley came to the door as they drove up. Tom must have called him.

"I don't deserve any credit for this one," Wimbie said.

"Nonsense. You put a lot of effort into it," Evan said.

"I just found him on the street. Maybe you can get more out of him than I could."

Evan put his arm on Rod's

shoulder and led him into the house.

"You just missed a call from your mother," he said. "She called just after Tom Lawson did. I told her that you'd wandered off, but you were back again. She'll be here Thursday to take you with her."

The boy smiled.

**W**imbie went back to Tom's office. Jeb Stinton, the deputy, was there alone. "Tom said he was going to take a look around Jim Quimby's."

Jim Quimby's house overlooked the bay from a slight rise. As Wimbie approached, Tom was peering through the kitchen window.

"Somebody's been in there, all right," he said. "Jim leaves things real neat. There's an awful mess on the floor and dirty pans on the stove."

"Rod's eyes look funny. His body moves funny. I think he's been doing drugs."

Tom nodded. "So that's the kind of trip he's been on. For a moment, I thought he'd got himself apported to the wind-jammer, but I didn't see how he

could have managed it. By the way, I never did ask Doc Cameron what he thought about Mabel that day."

"Lookin' fa' th' boah?"

They turned. Amos Thacher, tall and lanky, with a face like a rock, stood behind them.

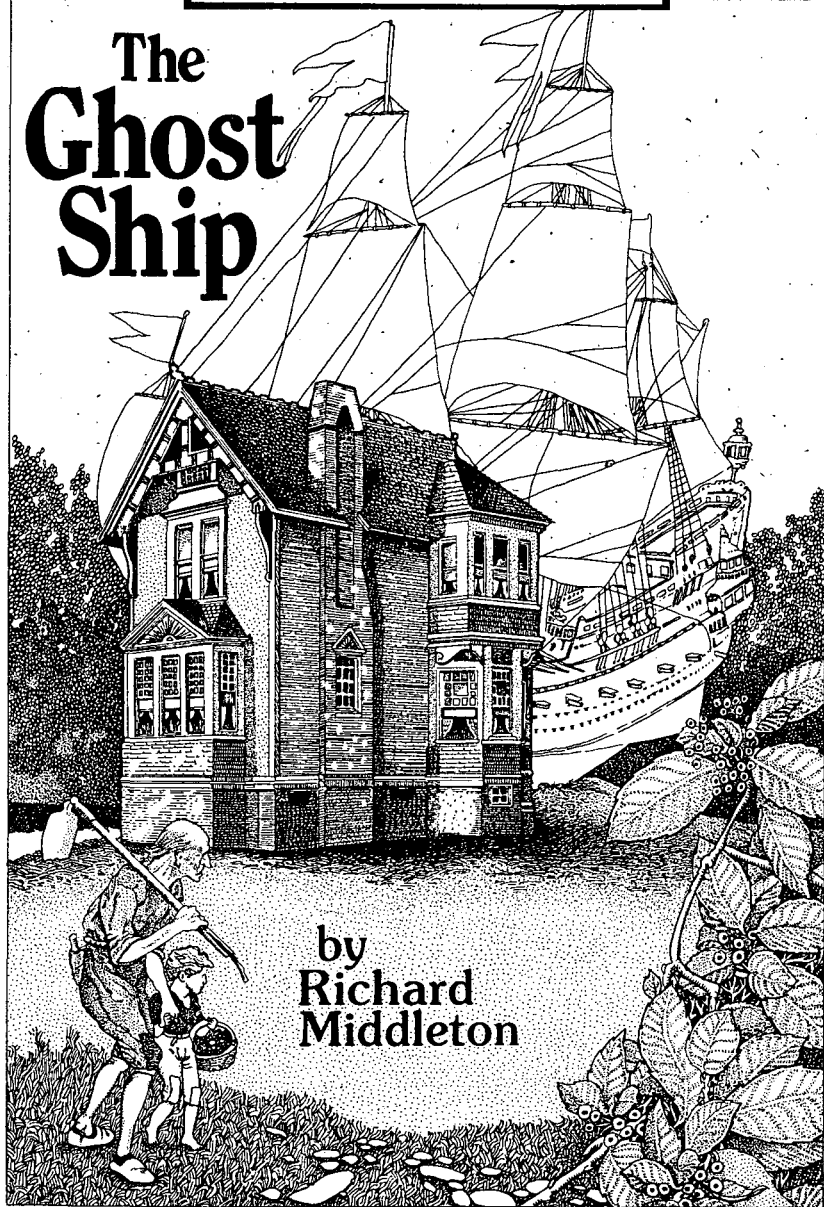
"I got th' key. Comin' to do some cleanin' up. Boah said he was wantin' a place. Thot maybuh he was girlin', but he said he was playin' a little joke on Gene, so I let 'um in. Couldn't tuhnd down a little joke on Gene. Figuhed theah wasn't anah hahm."

Tom stared at him. It was the longest speech he had ever heard Amos make. Wimbie even understood it.

Rod had played a little joke on everyone, Wimbie thought. He'd played all the angles to get just what he wanted. He'd built up to a dramatic last act. But he had a lot of growing up to do. Wimbie was glad the boy's mother was coming to get him. He hated to think what Rod might have apported for an encore. Or what he might have manipulated Gene to do. Rod should be writing scenarios. Maybe when he grew up he'd write one for his mother.

MYSTERY CLASSIC

# The Ghost Ship



by  
**Richard  
Middleton**

Illustration by Kurt Wallace

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**F**airfield is a little village lying near the Portsmouth Road about halfway between London and the sea. Strangers, who find it by accident now and then, call it a pretty, old fashioned place; we who live in it and call it home don't find anything very pretty about it, but we should be sorry to live anywhere else. Our minds have taken the shape of the inn and the church and the green, I suppose. At all events we never feel comfortable out of Fairfield.

Of course the Cockneys, with their vasty houses and noise-ridden streets, can call us rustics if they choose, but for all that Fairfield is a better place to live in than London. Doctor says that when he goes to London his mind is bruised with the weight of the houses, and he was a Cockney born. He had to live there himself when he was a little chap, but he knows better now. You gentlemen may laugh—perhaps some of you come from London way—but it seems to me that a witness like that is worth a gallon of arguments.

Dull? Well, you might find it dull, but I assure you that I've listened to all the London yarns you have spun tonight, and they're absolutely nothing to the things that happen at Fairfield. It's because of our way of thinking and minding our own business. If one of your Londoners were set down on the green of a Saturday night when the ghosts of the lads who died in the war keep tryst with the lasses who lie in the churchyard, he couldn't help being curious and interfering, and then the ghosts would go somewhere where it was quieter. But we just let them come and go and don't make any fuss, and in consequence Fairfield is the ghostiest place in all England. Why, I've seen a headless man sitting on the edge of the well in broad daylight, and the children playing about his feet as if he were their father. Take my word for it, spirits know when they are well off as much as human beings.

Still, I must admit that the thing I'm going to tell you about was queer even for our part of the world, where three packs of ghost-hounds hunt regularly during the season, and blacksmith's great-grandfather is busy all night shoeing the dead gentlemen's horses. Now that's a thing that wouldn't happen in London because of their interfering ways, but blacksmith he lies up aloft and sleeps as quiet as a lamb. Once when he had a bad head he shouted down to them not to make so much noise, and in the morning he found an old guinea left on the anvil as an apology. He wears it on his watch chain now. But I must get on with my story; if I start telling you about the queer happenings at Fairfield I'll never stop.

It all came of the great storm in the spring of '97, the year that we had two great storms. This was the first one, and I remember it very well because I found in the morning that it had lifted the thatch of my pigsty into the widow's garden as clean as a boy's kite. When I looked over the hedge, widow—Tom Lamport's widow, that was—was prodding for her nasturtiums with a daisy-grubber. After I had watched her for a little I went down to the Fox and Grapes to tell landlord what she had said to me. Landlord he laughed, being a married man and at ease with the sex. "Come to that," he said, "the tempest has blowed something into my field. A kind of a ship I think it would be."

I was surprised at that until he explained that it was only a ghost ship and would do no hurt to the turnips. We argued that it had been blown up from the sea at Portsmouth, and then we talked of something else. There were two slates down at the parsonage and a big tree in Lumley's meadow. It was a rare storm.

I reckon the wind had blown our ghosts all over England. They were coming back for days afterwards with foundered horses and as footsore as possible, and they were so glad to get back to Fairfield that some of them walked up the street crying like little children. Squire said that his great-grandfather's great-grandfather hadn't looked so dead-beat since the battle of Naseby, and he's an educated man.

What with one thing and another, I should think it was a week before we got straight again, and then one afternoon I met the landlord on the green and he had a worried face. "I wish you'd come and have a look at that ship in my field," he said to me; "it seems to me it's leaning real hard on the turnips. I can't bear thinking what the missus will say when she sees it."

I walked down the lane with him, and sure enough there was a ship in the middle of his field, but such a ship as no man had seen on the water for three hundred years, let alone in the middle of a turnip field. It was all painted black and covered with carvings, and there was a great bay window in the stern for all the world like the squire's drawing room. There was a crowd of little black cannon on deck and looking out of her portholes, and she was anchored at each end to the hard ground. I have seen the wonders of the world on picture postcards, but I have never seen anything to equal that.

"She seems very solid for a ghost ship," I said, seeing the landlord was bothered.

"I should say it's a betwixt and between," he answered, puzzling it over, "but it's going to spoil a matter of fifty turnips, and missus she'll want it moved." We went up to her and touched the side, and it was as hard as a real ship. "Now there's folks in England would call that very curious," he said.

Now I don't know much about ships, but I should think that that ghost ship weighed a solid two hundred tons, and it seemed to me that she had come to stay, so that I felt sorry for landlord, who was a married man. "All the horses in Fairfield won't move her out of my turnips," he said, frowning at her.

Just then we heard a noise on her deck, and we looked up and saw that a man had come out of her front cabin and was looking down at us very peaceably. He was dressed in a black uniform set out with rusty gold lace, and he had a great cutlass by his side in a brass sheath. "I'm Captain Bartholomew Roberts," he said, in a gentleman's voice, "put in for recruits. I seem to have brought her rather far up the harbor."

"Harbor!" cried landlord; "why, you're fifty miles from the sea."

Captain Roberts didn't turn a hair. "So much as that, is it?" he said coolly. "Well, it's of no consequence."

Landlord was a bit upset at this. "I don't want to be unneighborly," he said, "but I wish you hadn't brought your ship into my field. You see, my wife sets great store on these turnips."

The captain took a pinch of snuff out of a fine gold box that he pulled out of his pocket, and dusted his fingers with a silk handkerchief in a very genteel fashion. "I'm only here for a few months," he said; "but if a testimony of my esteem would pacify your good lady I should be content," and with the words he loosed a great gold brooch from the neck of his coat and tossed it down to landlord.

Landlord blushed as red as a strawberry. "I'm not denying she's fond of jewelry," he said, "but it's too much for half a sackful of turnips." And indeed it was a handsome brooch.

The captain laughed. "Tut, man," he said, "it's a forced sale, and you deserve a good price. Say no more about it"; and nodding good day to us, he turned on his heel and went into the cabin. Landlord walked back up the lane like a man with a weight off his mind. "That tempest has blowed me a bit of luck," he said; "the missus will be main pleased with that brooch. It's better than blacksmith's guinea, any day."

Ninety-seven was Jubilee year; the year of the second Jubilee, you remember, and we had great doings at Fairfield, so that we



hadn't much time to bother about the ghost ship, though anyhow it isn't our way to meddle in things that don't concern us. Landlord, he saw his tenant once or twice when he was hoeing his turnips and passed the time of day, and landlord's wife wore her new brooch to church every Sunday. But we didn't mix much with the ghosts at any time, all except an idiot lad there was in the village, and he didn't know the difference between a man and a ghost, poor innocent! On Jubilee Day, however, somebody told Captain Roberts why the church bells were ringing, and he hoisted a flag and fired off his guns like a loyal Englishman. 'Tis true the guns were shot, and one of the round shot knocked a hole in Farmer Johnstone's barn, but nobody thought much of that in such a season of rejoicing.

It wasn't till our celebrations were over that we noticed that anything was wrong in Fairfield. 'Twas shoemaker who told me first about it one morning at the Fox and Grapes. "You know my great-great-uncle?" he said to me.

"You mean Joshua, the quiet lad," I answered, knowing him well.

"Quiet!" said shoemaker indignantly. "Quiet you call him, coming home at three o'clock every morning as drunk as a magistrate and waking up the whole house with his noise."

"Why, it can't be Joshua!" I said, for I knew him for one of the most respectable young ghosts in the village.

"Joshua it is," said shoemaker; "and one of these nights he'll find himself out in the street if he isn't careful."

This kind of talk shocked me, I can tell you, for I don't like to hear a man abusing his own family, and I could hardly believe that a steady youngster like Joshua had taken to drink. But just then in came butcher Aylwin in such a temper that he could hardly drink his beer. "The young puppy! the young puppy!" he kept on saying; and it was some time before shoemaker and I found out that he was talking about his ancestor that fell at Senlac.

"Drink?" said shoemaker hopefully, for we all like company in our misfortunes, and butcher nodded grimly.

"The young noodle," he said, emptying his tankard.

Well, after that I kept my ears open, and it was the same story all over the village. There was hardly a young man among all the ghosts in Fairfield who didn't roll home in the small hours of the morning the worse for liquor. I used to wake up in the night and hear them stumble past my house, singing outrageous songs. The worst of it was that we couldn't keep the scandal to ourselves, and

the folk at Greenhill began to talk of "sodden Fairfield" and taught their children to sing a song about us:

*"Sodden Fairfield, sodden Fairfield, has no use for bread-and-butter,  
Rum for breakfast, rum for dinner, rum for tea, and rum for supper!"*

We are easygoing in our village, but we didn't like that.

Of course we soon found out where the young fellows went to get the drink, and landlord was terribly cut up that his tenant should have turned out so badly, but his wife wouldn't hear of parting with the brooch, so that he couldn't give the captain notice to quit. But as time went on, things grew from bad to worse, and at all hours of the day you would see those young reprobates sleeping it off on the village green. Nearly every afternoon a ghost-wagon used to jolt down to the ship with a lading of rum, and though the older ghosts seemed inclined to give the captain's hospitality the go-by, the youngsters were neither to hold nor to bind.

So one afternoon when I was taking my nap I heard a knock at the door, and there was parson looking very serious, like a man with a job before him that he didn't altogether relish. "I'm going down to talk to the captain about all this drunkenness in the village, and I want you to come with me," he said straight out.

I can't say that I fancied the visit much myself, and I tried to hint to parson that as, after all, they were only a lot of ghosts, it didn't very much matter.

"Dead or alive, I'm responsible for their good conduct," he said, "and I'm going to do my duty and put a stop to this continued disorder. And you are coming with me, John Simmons." So I went, parson being a persuasive kind of man.

We went down to the ship, and as we approached her I could see the captain tasting the air on the deck. When he saw parson he took off his hat very politely, and I can tell you that I was relieved to find that he had a proper respect for the cloth. Parson acknowledged his salute and spoke out stoutly enough. "Sir, I should be glad to have a word with you."

"Come on board, sir; come on board," said the captain, and I could tell by his voice that he knew why we were there. Parson and I climbed up an uneasy kind of ladder, and the captain took us into the great cabin at the back of the ship, where the bay window was. It was the most wonderful place you ever saw in your life, all full

of gold and silver plate, swords with jewelled scabbards, carved oak chairs, and great chests that looked as though they were bursting with guineas. Even parson was surprised, and he did not shake his head very hard when the captain took down some silver cups and poured us out a drink of rum. I tasted mine, and I don't mind saying that it changed my view of things entirely. There was nothing betwixt and between about that rum, and I felt that it was ridiculous to blame the lads for drinking too much of stuff like that. It seemed to fill my veins with honey and fire.

Parson put the case squarely to the captain, but I didn't listen much to what he said; I was busy sipping my drink and looking through the window at the fishes swimming to and fro over landlord's turnips. Just then it seemed the most natural thing in the world that they should be there, though afterwards, of course, I could see that that proved it was a ghost ship.

But even then I thought it was queer when I saw a drowned sailor float by in the thin air with his hair and beard all full of bubbles. It was the first time I had seen anything quite like that at Fairfield.

All the time I was regarding the wonders of the deep, parson was telling Captain Roberts how there was no peace or rest in the village owing to the curse of drunkenness, and what a bad example the youngsters were setting to the older ghosts. The captain listened very attentively, and only put in a word now and then about boys being boys and young men sowing their wild oats. But when parson had finished his speech he filled up our silver cups and said to parson, with a flourish, "I should be sorry to cause trouble anywhere where I have been made welcome, and you will be glad to hear that I put to sea tomorrow night. And now you must drink me a prosperous voyage." So we all stood up and drank the toast with honor, and that noble rum was like hot oil in my veins.

After that captain showed us some of the curiosities he had brought back from foreign parts, and we were greatly amazed, though afterwards I couldn't clearly remember what they were. And then I found myself walking across the turnips with parson, and I was telling him of the glories of the deep that I had seen through the window of the ship. He turned on me severely. "If I were you, John Simmons," he said, "I should go straight home to bed." He has a way of putting things that wouldn't occur to an ordinary man, has parson, and I did as he told me.

Well, next day it came on to blow, and it blew harder and harder,

till about eight o'clock at night I heard a noise and looked out into the garden. I dare say you won't believe me, it seems a bit tall even to me, but the wind had lifted the thatch of my pigsty into the widow's garden a second time. I thought I wouldn't wait to hear what widow had to say about it, so I went across the green to the Fox and Grapes, and the wind was so strong that I danced along on tiptoe like a girl at the fair. When I got to the inn, landlord had to help me shut the door; it seemed as though a dozen goats were pushing against it to come in out of the storm.

"It's a powerful tempest," he said, drawing the beer. "I hear there's a chimney down at Dickory End."

"It's a funny thing how these sailors know about the weather," I answered. "When captain said he was going tonight, I was thinking it would take a capful of wind to carry the ship back to sea, but now here's more than a capful."

"Ah, yes," said landlord, "it's tonight he goes true enough, and mind you, though he treated me handsome over the rent, I'm not sure it's a loss to the village. I don't hold with gentrice who fetch their drink from London instead of helping local traders to get their living."

"But you haven't got any rum like his," I said, to draw him out.

His neck grew red above his collar, and I was afraid I'd gone too far; but after a while he got his breath with a grunt.

"John Simmons," he said, "if you've come down here this windy night to talk a lot of fool's talk, you've wasted a journey."

Well, of course, then I had to smooth him down with praising his rum, and Heaven forgive me for swearing it was better than captain's. For the like of that rum no living lips have tasted save mine and parson's. But somehow or other I brought landlord round, and presently we must have a glass of his best to prove its quality.

"Beat that if you can!" he cried, and we both raised our glasses to our mouths, only to stop halfway and look at each other in amaze. For the wind that had been howling outside like an outrageous dog had all of a sudden turned as melodious as the carol boys of a Christmas Eve.

"Surely that's not my Martha," whispered landlord, Martha being his great-aunt that lived in the loft overhead.

We went to the door, and the wind burst it open so that the handle was driven clean into the plaster of the wall. But we didn't think about that at the time, for over our heads, sailing very comfortably through the windy stars, was the ship that had passed the

summer in landlord's field. Her portholes and her bay window were blazing with lights, and there was a noise of singing and fiddling on her decks. "He's gone," shouted landlord above the storm, "and he's taken half the village with him!" I could only nod in answer, not having lungs like bellows of leather.

In the morning we were able to measure the strength of the storm, and over and above my pigsty there was damage enough wrought in the village to keep us busy. True it is that the children had to break down no branches for the firing that autumn, since the wind had strewn the woods with more than they could carry away. Many of our ghosts were scattered abroad, but this time very few came back, all the young men having sailed with captain; and not only ghosts, for the poor half-witted lad was missing, and we reckoned that he had stowed himself away or perhaps shipped as cabin boy, not knowing any better.

What with the lamentations of the ghost-girls and the grumblings of families who had lost an ancestor, the village was upset for a while, and the funny thing was that it was the folk who had complained most of the carryings-on of the youngsters who made most noise now that they were gone. I hadn't any sympathy with shoemaker or butcher, who ran about saying how much they missed their lads, but it made me grieve to hear the poor bereaved girls calling their lovers by name on the village green at nightfall. It didn't seem fair to me that they should have lost their men a second time, after giving up life in order to join them, as like as not. Still, not even a spirit can be sorry forever, and after a few months we made up our minds that the folk who had sailed in the ship were never coming back, and we didn't talk about it any more.

And then one day, I dare say it would be a couple of years after, when the whole business was quite forgotten, who should come traipsing along the road from Portsmouth but the daft lad who had gone away with the ship, without waiting till he was dead to become a ghost. You never saw such a boy as that in all your life. He had a great rusty cutlass hanging to a string at his waist, and he was tattooed all over in fine colors, so that even his face looked like a girl's sampler. He had a handkerchief in his hand full of foreign shells and old fashioned pieces of small money, very curious, and he walked up to the well outside his mother's house and drew himself a drink as if he had been nowhere in particular.

The worst of it was that he had come back as softheaded as he went, and try as we might we couldn't get anything reasonable out

of him. He talked a lot of gibberish about keelhauling and walking the plank and crimson murders—things which a decent sailor should know nothing about, so that it seemed to me that for all his manners captain had been more of a pirate than a gentleman mariner. But to draw sense out of that boy was as hard as picking cherries off a crabtree. One silly tale he had that he kept on drifting back to, and to hear him you would have thought that it was the only thing that happened to him in his life. "We was at anchor," he would say, "off an island called the Basket of Flowers, and the sailors had caught a lot of parrots and we were teaching them to swear. Up and down the decks, up and down the decks, and the language they used was dreadful. Then we looked up and saw the masts of the Spanish ship outside the harbor. Outside the harbor they were, so we threw the parrots into the sea and sailed out to fight. And all the parrots were drowned in the sea and the language they used was dreadful." That's the sort of boy he was, nothing but silly talk of parrots when we asked him about the fighting. And we never had a chance of teaching him better, for two days after he ran away again, and hasn't been seen since.

That's my story, and I assure you that things like that are happening at Fairfield all the time. The ship has never come back, but somehow as people grow older they seem to think that one of these windy nights she'll come sailing in over the hedges with all the lost ghosts on board. Well, when she comes, she'll be welcome. There's one ghost-lass that has never grown tired of waiting for her lad to return. Every night you'll see her out on the green, straining her poor eyes with looking for the mastlights among the stars. A faithful lass you'd call her, and I'm thinking you'd be right.

Landlord's field wasn't a penny the worse for the visit, but they do say that since then the turnips that have been grown in it have tasted of rum.

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## **SOLUTION TO THE OCTOBER "UNSOLVED":**

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The fourth speaker is a Washington.

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon

Photo by Jerry Bauer



P.D. JAMES

Scotland Yard Superintendent Adam Dalgliesh debuted in 1962 in *Cover Her Face*. Reviewers and readers alike have been singing the praises of P.D. James ever since.

And for very good reasons. In six novels (and in a brief appearance a seventh), published poet Adam Dalgliesh proves to have very few peers in the genre of detective fiction.

He's over six feet tall, described by his creator as "dark, lean and easy moving." He's long been a widower when we first meet him, and we learn that his only son died, with his mother, within a day of his birth. If this personal tragedy scarred Dalgliesh for life, turn-

ing him from an outgoing personality into a near-misanthrope, it's never stated. We do know that he doesn't altogether shun people, and that he's had a few love affairs. There's one going on in the background of several of the novels. But *background* is the key word here. Dalgliesh's private life is not made much of in these novels. The story usually opens without him, and—as in life—he makes his appearance once a murder has been committed. (Of course, there are exceptions to every rule, as in *The Black Tower*.) His instincts are keen, as are his intuitions about people. Outwardly he appears cool, analytical, re-



lentless, totally objective; some even find him cold.

James writes around the usual themes, the standard motives to murder. Interestingly, she often finds love—obsessional love, rather than merely illicit romance—an inspiration. And because of her twenty years' experience with the National Health Service, P.D. James relies quite heavily on her medical knowledge. Even the tales that aren't set against medical backdrops (*Cover Her Face*, *Unnatural Causes*, and *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*) have more forensic and pathological detail than most mysteries. And some of the best do have medical settings. *The Black Tower*, for example, is on the grounds of Toynnton Grange, an isolated cliffside mansion that's been converted into a home for the physically handicapped. *A Mind to Murder* is intricately plotted, and takes place in the snooty Steen Psychiatric Clinic on a posh London square. *Shroud for a Nightingale* offers up a murderer who's stalking the nurses in a teaching hospital in Sussex, while *Death of an Expert Witness* occurs in a nationally-known police lab outside of London.

There are locked-room puzzles, and cases where it appears that everyone (with the possible exception of Dalgliesh) has an alibi for the correct time.

Each novel shows us a bit more of our favorite detective—a seaside holiday with his aunt, interrupted by murder and a horrifying scene during a coastal storm of hurricane proportions (*Unnatural Causes*); the beginning of a serious affair with a woman whose mother Dalgliesh helped send to prison (*A Mind to Murder*); and a different view of Dalgliesh, now promoted to commander, in a brief appearance on a case which he isn't able to bring to trial (*An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, the seventh novel, which rightfully belongs to the young detective, Cordelia Gray).

I will bet that as you read through the half dozen books, you will come to at least a dozen erroneous conclusions to the inevitable question of whodunit. James is skillful at diverting the reader's attention away from the tiny true clues and toward the fascinating red herrings. She doesn't cheat, and only on rare occasions might one accuse her of stretching our credibility too far or relying too much on coincidence. She is, quite simply, mistress of her plots.

If you don't know what I'm talking about, read P.D. James and you soon will. P.D. James novels were published in hardcover by Charles Scribner's Sons, and are available in paperback in Warner Books editions.

## MYSTERY REVIEWS

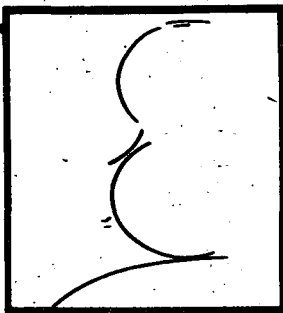
Virginia Rich has concocted another delicious meal of a mystery, with all the special ingredients her fans so savored in her first two books (*The Baked Bean Supper Murders* and *The Cooking School Murders*). The new entree is titled **The Nantucket Diet Murders**; its setting is Nantucket during the Christmas holidays. Genia Potter is back for a visit among old friends, all of them widows like herself and women of independent means. Their surprising new hairdos and svelte waistlines testify to the power wielded by a handsome newcomer, a dietitian/doctor from Europe. Mrs. Potter soon suspects that the doctor has a dark secret in his past. Worse, she fears that two recent "accidents" might actually have been premeditated. Rich's women are especially engaging and sympathetic and authentic; her locales are so carefully drawn that one can smell the salt air along the beach and the fragrance of bread baking in the oven. The discussions of food—and the actual recipes that adorn the book's endpapers—ensure that these books will remain on one's shelf for a long time to come. (Delacorte, \$13.95, 276 pp.)

Monsieur Pamplemousse is also a lover of food. In fact, he's a secret critic for a famous European restaurant guide. He's also a co-star (with his dog, Pommes Frites) in **Monsieur Pamplemousse**, subtitled "A Gastronomic Mystery." This one comes from Michael Bond, the creator of the Paddington Bear stories. It's a madcap mystery, set in a very select French hotel, and if it's about as substantial as a chocolate mousse it's also nearly as much fun, with a whimsical, almost nonsensical, air to the goings-on that readers will probably either love or hate. (Beaufort Books, \$13.95, 191 pp.)

**Death of an Old Girl** is one of Elizabeth Lemarchand's old titles, but it's been issued for the first time in the U.S. by Walker and Company (\$13.95, 255 pp.). The setting is the snooty Meldon School for Girls in England; the time is the weekend of their annual reunion and general festivity. The victim is alumna and snoop Beatrice Baynes, who lives across the road from the school. Inspector Pollard and Sergeant Toye are called in from the Yard to find out why the woman was murdered in the art department, and why her body was hurriedly stuffed into an old puppet theater. The suspects are many, and again it's Toye's patient examination of motive that leads him to the surprising solution.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by Peter Shaw



**T**he stupendous weight of the atmosphere in a Florida Gulf Coast summer, a reporter whose institutionalized wife will never recover her wits, a ruthless local developer set to despoil an untouched island and the surrounding bay, a young widow with two children who fights the good fight for the environment—these are the professionally stirred ingredients of John D. MacDonald's 1962 novel, **A Flash of Green**, now faithfully transferred to the screen.

MacDonald is the creator of detective Travis McGee, and the author of more than sixty novels. He is sometimes confused with his namesakes Ross Macdonald and Gregory Mcdonald. As it happens, both of those writers are the subjects of profiles by AHMM's Mary Cannon: Ross Macdonald, the creator of detective Lew Archer,

in August, and Gregory Mcdonald, the creator of both newspaperman sleuth Fletch and Boston detective Flynn, in next month's issue.

John D. MacDonald is a more facile, pulpier author than either of the others. He is capable, for example, of writing a popular blockbuster such as *Condominium*. That book was appropriately made into a TV movie that has this reviewer's endorsement as one of the two or three worst presentations ever developed for the small screen. It is hard to say why a big screen film company has now chosen to dramatize *A Flash of Green* instead of a Travis McGee book. For while all of the elements of a thriller are present in the steamy Florida setting, the action simply wilts with the heat. In its place, MacDonald has expanded greatly on the little specula-

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Ed Harris playing Jimmy Wing in *A Flash of Green*.

tive-philosophical musings that pepper his detective novels. This time there are thoughts on corruption when the reporter, Jimmy Wing, sells out by spying for the nicely named developer, Elmo Bliss, and on bravery when Jimmy rebels, exposes the dirty dealings, and then allows himself to be beaten up.

But by far the most space is taken up in homilies on the environment. In fact, MacDonald carries on at sufficient length about this worthy subject to make Elmo Bliss start to seem positively attractive: at least this fellow doesn't lecture. There can be no essays on screen, of course, but Elmo wins sympathy there, too, just by being more vivid than the do-gooders

ranged against him. They are a group of people less interesting than the next door neighbors. Jimmy Wing keeps insisting, correctly, that he's nothing special. "Do I sound like a college sophomore?" he asks after delivering several of author MacDonald's homilies. The answer from this reader: "yes." The widow, Kat, makes love to Jimmy and then sums herself up all too accurately: "I just feel . . . sort of ordinary and trivial." The book develops a certain amount of interest when Elmo lures Jimmy Wing into his employ by cleverly appealing to his principles, then slowly corrupts him. In the movie, though, Jimmy plunges in with eyes open, thereby eliminating the plot's one potential for intrigue.

If *A Flash of Green* had been shown in the darkened auditorium of my old high school, we'd have cheered the real estate villain, Elmo, just to protest the lack of action and the heavy-handed attempts to improve our opinions. Back in the classroom, Mrs. Young would have given us a proper dressing down to make us feel guilty. On the way home, though, we would have draped ourselves over the bus seats in an extravagant show of how the movie had put us to sleep. We'd have called *A Flash of Green* a flash in the pan—and we'd have been right.

# The Return of Alfred Hitchcock

by Robert Bloch



“**T**o be or not be; that is the question.”

And a tough question it was for Hamlet to answer. I can sympathize with him, because I have a question, too—a question which is perhaps even tougher.

Over the past twenty-odd years it has echoed again and again from interviewers, talk-show hosts, correspondents, and fans. All of them ask the same thing—“*What was Alfred Hitchcock really like?*”

And my reply is, “Which Alfred Hitchcock are you talking about?”

For there were, of course, many of them. One was Hitchcock the director, the man whose work in films earned him his undisputed title as “The Master of Suspense.” Another, only recently revealed in various biographies, was an extremely introverted man who strove to conceal his shyness, repressions, and innermost fears.

Alfred Hitchcock’s public *persona* was the product of private collaborators. There was the Hitchcock of Alma Reville—his longtime wife and uncredited amanuensis. A former writer, she influenced his creative choices, contributed to his work

on screenplays, helped fashion the course of his career.

There was also Hitchcock the anthologist, whose numerous collections of macabre short stories were the composite creation of a series of editors working behind the scenes to choose the contents and pen introductions in the proper Hitchcockian manner. Others labored in the same fashion to edit and embellish *Alfred Hitchcock’s Mystery Magazine*.

But the Hitchcock best known to the general public was, and is, the image that flickers forth from the television screen in his series, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*.

This is the Hitchcock of James Allardice, the man who wrote the brilliantly witty introductions to the programs and established Hitch’s reputation as a droll, sardonic gallows-humorist. The shows themselves were collaborative efforts of producers Joan Harrison, Norman Lloyd, and story-editor Gordon Hessler. They helped select the stories, guided writers hired to do the scripts, assigned the directors, approved the casting, and supervised every phase of production.

The result was a full decade of exceptional entertainment, memorable to multimillions of viewers and still successful, more than twenty years later, in syndicated showings.

It was this aspect of Hitchcock I am most familiar with. Although I furnished a novel—*Psycho*—to his film career, wrote half a dozen tales for his magazine, and appeared in many of his anthologies, it's the sixteen stories I contributed and/or adapted for his shows that brought me closest to what Alfred Hitchcock was really like.

Working with that terrific trio—Joan Harrison, Norman Lloyd, and Gordon Hessler—was a delightful experience, and one seldom encountered since.

When I entered television late in 1959, I'd just sold two stories to the show, both of which were adapted by others. I myself started out doing original teleplays for a low-budget series forgotten today and scarcely noticed even then. Quite suddenly I was summoned to the Hitchcock office and offered an opportunity to adapt one of their properties for the program. It was the kind of break every television writer dreamed of—a giant leap from the bottom of the ladder to the topmost rung. *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* was a symbol of prestige; hundreds of my colleagues dreamed of moving from their

dog-and-pony shows to this class act.

I was underprepared and overwhelmed, but the Hitchcock team helped me make the transition, and I stayed on until I adapted the very last show of the last hour series—aptly titled “Off-Season”—six years later.

Hitchcock himself was seldom present in the production office, but there was never any doubt of his constant and consummate influence on every decision affecting the show—the choice of stories, the selection of everyone responsible for bringing them to the screen. His was the guiding hand, his the standards contributing to the quality of the program.

Consider for a moment what he achieved—two hundred and sixty-six individual story episodes, most of which consisted of a few characters working on interior sets without the benefit of color, visual trickery, special effects, or gimmickry. The drama and suspense came from the wry humor, offbeat situations, and frequent surprise endings.

Imagine anyone daring to bring off such a feat today—two hundred and sixty-six suspense shows without any car chases!

During my half-dozen years of working with the producers, there were many meetings and story conferences, but in not

one of them did I ever hear a single outburst of profanity. Strange as it may seem to the current crop of television tycoons, every production problem was solved without the use of four-letter words.

If, by any chance, Queen Elizabeth had walked into the office, she would have found Joan Harrison suitably dressed to welcome Her Majesty. And neither Norman Lloyd or Gordon Hessler ever appeared in bluejeans.

Recently I escorted an out-of-town visitor around a studio lot. "Why do all those producers wear jeans?" he inquired. "They look as if they were dressed for hauling fertilizer."

To which I promptly replied, "Well—"

No doubt about it: the Hitchcock show reflected its namesake's high standards of taste in entertainment.

And now it is returning. Twenty years later—the long period of Rip Van Winkle's slumber. As you may recall, when Rip awoke after two decades of shut-eye he found himself in a totally changed world, one in which he felt completely lost.

During the absence of new Hitchcock shows from programming, the world has undergone far more changes than those Rip Van Winkle encountered. Will the series suffer the same

fate when it comes back again?

My answer is a ringing *No!* The world changes, but audience response remains the same. Viewers still respond to the clever and convincing characterizations, offbeat and unusual stories offering surprise and suspense. And Alfred Hitchcock, despite the assists received from creative collaborators, contributed his own unique genius to the program that bore his name.

Starting this fall, on Sunday evenings from eight thirty to nine P.M., NBC will mount a full season of twenty-two Hitchcock shows produced by Christopher Crowe, Andrew Mirisch, and Alan Barnette—three skilled and seasoned television talents. A few of these Universal productions will be new stories; the majority are revised and updated versions of the original programs, in full color. All will be hosted by Alfred Hitchcock himself, his famous introductions color-computerized for today's viewers. It's a clever concept and an exciting one to all of us who realize how much lustre Hitchcock lent to TV's Golden Age.

If the new show retains that magic ingredient—the "Hitchcock touch"—it will touch the minds and quicken the pulses of a whole new generation, eager to see what *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*.



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## SONG OF THE SIREN by Steven Wineinger

"Ah, the salt air. I really need this fishing weekend, Mickey."

"The Crenshaw case, Lieutenant Ryan?"

"Yes. A real puzzler. How could a beautiful, wealthy woman like Lucy Crenshaw marry that lout of a merchant seaman? A match made in Hades, if you ask me. She's disappeared and now he's living it up in what used to be her mansion. He did her in, I'm sure of it, but we can't come up with the body. Got to have that body. Well, I'll worry about that Monday. Today I'm a fisherman." Ryan threw a long cast into the sea. "Ever read Homer, Mick?"

"No sir, but I expect I will when I get to college."

"Well, it was on just such rocks as these that the legendary sirens used to lure ancient Greek sailors to their deaths. Sirens were women whose singing was so beautiful that the sailors would jump overboard. Nuts, huh?"

"They weren't here in Maine, sir, were they?"

"No, Mick. In the Mediterranean. It's just a myth."

The boy stood up and pointed down to a rock directly below them. "Then that lady is not a siren, sir?"

"Good Lord," cried Ryan as he threw down his pole and peered over the edge. "In a way, my young friend, that could very well be a siren. Unless I miss my guess, that's Lucy Crenshaw, and she's going to sing a tune that will lead to one merchant seaman's downfall. Now scoot. I've work to do."

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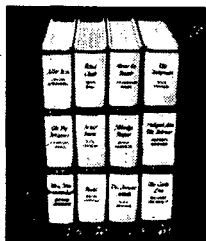
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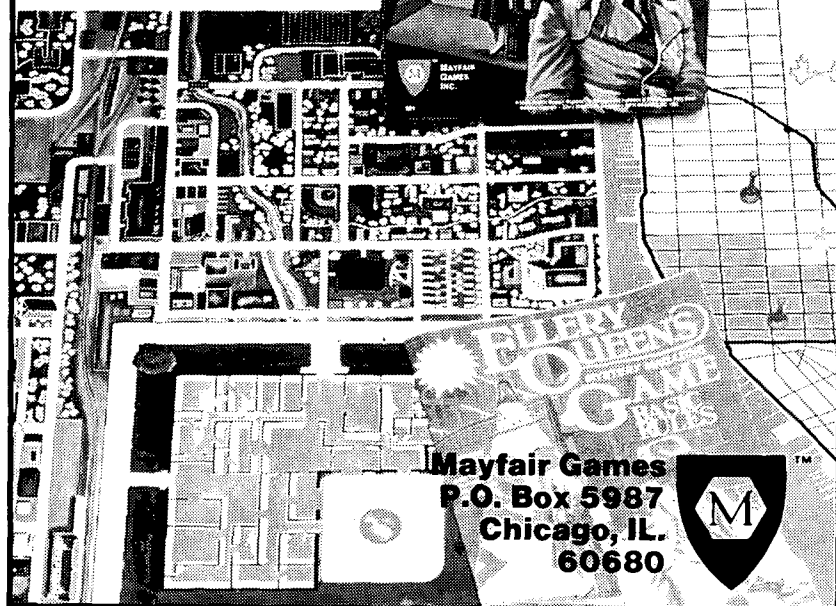
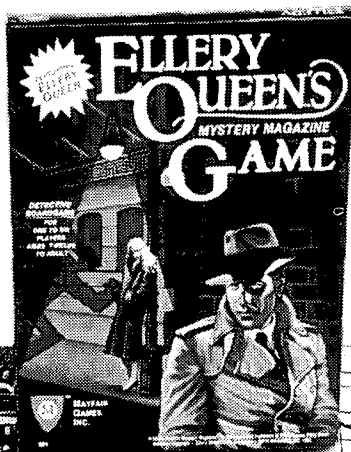
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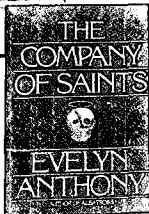
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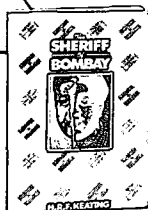
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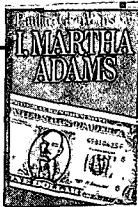
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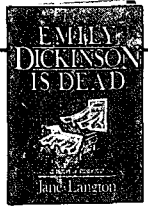
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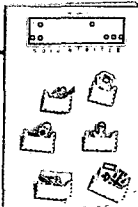
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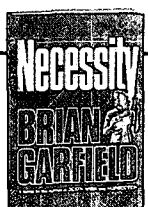
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